



GIBSON LES PAUL £969 TRIBUTE 2018

Who says you can't get a bona fide American-made LP for under a grand?

It wasn't long ago that Les Paul Studios were the most affordable line in the range, giving guitarists that classic mahogany body/maple cap and double humbucker tone without any need for re-mortgaging their homes. Now with this year's models creeping up to the £1,300 mark, it's the revamped Tribute series that is now serving those in pursuit of quality, American-made instruments on a more wallet-friendly budget.

At first glance, not a whole lot seems different compared to the older Standards although the cut of the body feels marginally

robotic tuners, neon colours and floating bridges in recent years, the public vote through sales has been fairly unanimous: it's the classic features that remain the main selling point for any instrument emblazoned with the company's logo. After all, why change a winning formula? Of course, not all change need be unnecessary. Sweetening the deal with the Tribute 2018 is the availability of all models in left-handed for the exact same price and cryogenically-treated frets (see p92) across the entire Gibson 2018 catalogue, topped off by all-new brown leather gig bags that are equally as sturdy as they

GOOD FOR JANGLY INDIE ROCK AND HEAVY METAL WORSHIP

thinner. Unlike the Les Paul Faded, which sits at a similar entry-level Gibson price point, this guitar has no weight relief whatsoever – effectively paying 'tribute' to the chunky blocks of wood that the brand built its name on, though in this case without being overwhelmingly heavy. The Faded Honeyburst and Gold Top colour schemes in satin finish, along with acrylic trapezoid inlays, gold/silver top hat controls and vintage keystone tuners, also do well in harking back to the timeless looks of the Gibson glory years. Following the news of the Memphis factory's sale late last year after reports of mounting debts and declining sales, this is something the wider world could do with being reminded of.

Despite all its attempts to update their solid bodies with

are pleasing on the eye.

Utilising the same pickup combination found in most Customs, a 490 in the neck and slightly hotter 498 by the bridge, the Tribute can cover a lot of tonal ground – from warm blues and woolly jazz to heavy rock, though it naturally falls short on country spank, like any guitar lacking the glassiness of single coils. Dialling down the tone while on the rhythm setting invites even thicker sounds, reminiscent of the creamy leads made famous by Slash or Gary Moore. The treble pickup offers a lot more grit – suitable for everything from jangly indie-rock chords to full-blown heavy metal worship – and most impressively of all, cleans up incredibly well at around 3 on the volume dial.

With low action out of

1 HEADSTOCK
One of the Tribute's key selling points is that you simply won't find both of these logos on a headstock for less money

2 PICKUPS
The 490 and 498 are a medium output PAF-style alnico pair that can cover most vintage and modern sounds with ease

3 TOP
A plain maple top gives this instrument a classic look similar to Slash's main weapons from the early days of Guns N' Roses

AT A GLANCE

BODY: Mahogany w/ plain maple top

NECK: Mahogany

SCALE: 628mm (24.75")

FINGERBOARD: Rosewood

FRETS: 22

PICKUPS: Neck: 490R Bridge: 498T

CONTROLS: 2x volume, 2x tone, 1x 3-way pickup selector

HARDWARE: Aluminum Tune-O-Matic bridge, Aluminum Stop Bar tailpiece, vintage keystone tuners

LEFT-HANDED: Yes

FINISH: Satin Faded Honeyburst or Satin Gold Top

CONTACT: Gibson
gibson.com





Ice Age

So what exactly is a cryogenically treated fret?

First introduced in 2014 and now standard across this year's range, these frets benefit from a process where the fretwire is exposed to extreme cold temperatures around -300° Fahrenheit, using liquid nitrogen to increase resistance to bacteria, rust and general wear and tear. The concept was developed by NASA and used in the airline and automobile industries – and is known to make metals stronger without being any harder or affecting their feel. Heavy-duty testing from Gibson revealed that after 277,000 string bends, standard frets wore down four times faster at 0.2mm compared to the cryogenic's 0.05mm. According to Gibson: "This means that your guitar will almost certainly never need a fret job (unless you plan to live for several centuries)."

the box and set up with light gauge strings running across its slim taper neck, the Tribute is easy to pick up and play – an ideal purchase, then, for newer players looking to get their second or third instrument. Having said that, we found for more professional situations, it falls slightly short on tuning stability. The guitar doesn't 'lock' itself into a tuning quite as naturally as higher-end or vintage Les Pauls, which often sit at the top of the list of dependable workhorses for recording or touring musicians because of their reliable and rugged resistance.



A PAF-style alnico pickup in the neck is matched by a twin on the bridge



As far as compromises go, it's not a bad one – once settled into a tighter setup with heavier gauge strings, the issue could be perfectly manageable or even completely eradicated. Truth be told, the mahogany, maple and rosewood won't be the finest lying around in the Gibson factory, but it's good enough to bear the stamp and, most importantly of all, it sounds the part, too.

The Faded Honeyburst's plain top gives the instrument a simple elegance that's much more modest than the high-end quilts and flames, while the Gold Top screams

vintage class – neither giving any indication of their lower price point. If the Tribute's main goal is to offer players a taste of Gibson's greatest legacy and access to sounds at the heart of many a classic recording – at a fraction of the cost – then it's undoubtedly a resounding success.

Amit Sharma

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

ALSO TRY...

EPIPHONE LES PAUL TRIBUTE PLUS

With Gibson USA '57 Classic pickups and a premium hardcase, one wonders how the top line of Les Pauls compare to Gibson's affordable instruments.

£679



PRS SE 245

Offering superb money for value at virtually half the price of the Tribute, this year's all-new PRS SE 245 might not be American-made but it remains an equally tantalising proposition.

£495



LTD EC-1000

Not only boasting a convincing and winning combination of gold hardware on a black finish, the EC-1000 Duncan also offers locking tuners and Seymour Duncan pickups.

£884

