



# EPIPHONE ALEX LIFESON LES PAUL ACCESS STANDARD

£799

## Roll the tones

Last issue, we looked at Epiphone's recognition of a rising star in guitar with Emily Wolfe's signature Sheraton, and now we're going to the other extreme – a legend with a career spanning five decades. What they both have in common is artist models that put distinct spins on established Gibson designs that are vital to the company's visions of legacy and innovation. Just as Wolfe's Stealth guitar brings the semi-hollow blueprint to a new generation and enhances the Epiphone catalogue, Lifeson's Les Paul finally coming at a more affordable price-point opens up one of the boldest takes on an LP to new players.

Ten years ago, Alex Lifeson told

key features and is known for being a lighter Les Paul, the Rush man consciously went for a non-chambered, weightier option. That equates to a substantial nine pounds here.

And this is despite the reduced body thickness over a standard Les Paul, here 1 and 3/4-inches at its thickest compared to a Standard's 1 and 7/8-inches. A Comfort-Carve belly scarf enhances the closeness we feel with this guitar over a usual Les Paul and the reduced neck heel improves upper fret access too – hence the name.

The Viceroy Brown Lifeson favours is a pleasing sunburst that brings the classic Les Paul heritage to bring balance to the impact of the great diversion here; a double-

## “ QUITE SIMPLY A STUNNINGLY VERSATILE LES PAUL ”

TG how his Gibson signature was, based on the Axxess model and its thinner body but with caveats. “We went with a very heavy [non chambered] mahogany so it still has weight and resonance,” he explained. “There's a lot [of electronics] in the guitar so it was important to have a good solid block as a starting point.”

There's plenty of talking points here; including those electronics, in addition to enhanced fret access and the locking tremolo that will immediately divide opinion between purists and progressives. Our Les Paul expectations could be challenged here.

When Lifeson said “very heavy”, he was talking about his own early serial Gibson signatures. While the standard Axxess shares

locking tremolo and the same Floyd Rose licensed Graph Tech Ghost unit found on the Gibson version with a Floyd Rose R4 Locking Nut.

Alongside the traditional body mahogany/maple cap combo, the fretboard wood here is Indian Laurel, a more affordable alternative to rosewood and visually similar. A fine aesthetic, but the five cavity covers at the back suggest there's more than the scope of vibrato unit spicing up the recipe for expansion here.

The man himself told us exactly what that meant back for his own guitar back in 2011. “We have coil taps on the pickups, a Floyd Rose and the piezo is the second jack – the Life-O-Sound – that we run independently or you can mix ➔

### 1 CONTROLS

Because the piezo uses the usual bridge pickup tone control pot position (you push it to activate or can just dial it off), the neck position tone is instead a master tone.

### 2 SIGNATURE TOUCH

Lifeson's signature is on the truss rod cover and the separate piezo output jack is dubbed the Life-O-sound here,

### 3 DOUBLE-LOCKING TREMOLO

A locking tremolo feels strange on a Les Paul at first but it soon becomes a lot of fun. It's really not just divebomb city either; you can add pitching accents to chords and notes that bring new ways to emotive with your playing, but with great tuning stability.

### AT A GLANCE

**BODY** Carved Maple with AAA Flame Maple veneer

**NECK** Mahogany

**SCALE** 628mm (24.7")

**FINGERBOARD**

Indian Laurel

**FRETS** 22

**PICKUPS** Epiphone ProBucker 3 (bridge), Epiphone Ceramic Pro (neck)

**CONTROLS** Neck Volume, Bridge Volume (each with push/pull coil split), Piezo

Volume with push/pull on/off, Master Tone

**HARDWARE** Floyd Rose R4 locking nut, Graph Tech Ghost Tremolo w/ piezo saddles, Epiphone Deluxe tuners with Keystone buttons

**LEFT-HANDED** No

**FINISH** Viceroy Brown

**CASE** EpiLite

**CONTACT**

www.epiphone.com





## On Lockdown

In defence of the double-locking tremolo

The double-locking tremolo design is owned and licensed by Floyd Rose and it divides player opinion, but the association with shredders, tricky string changes and fiddly tuning is somewhat unfair, to say the least. We'd argue it's simply a matter of getting used to the change and then enjoying the greater tonal and practical flexibility offered here. The idea of the locking system is to remove any tuning variables from string winds at the tuning pegs; each string is locked at each end, with a locking nut preventing the machine heads from being used, and a 'floating bridge' held and balanced against the string tension via a spring design that locks at the other end.

both magnetic pickups and the piezo through the main output.

The versatility of Les Pauls is often unsung – myriad tones can be accessed via shaping gain and EQ through the volume and tone controls. But this guitar is on a whole other level; factor in the three pickup positions for humbucker and coil-splits. Now add bridge and middle positions for piezo, with and without coil-split from the bridge. Oh, and you have a fantastically expressive tremolo system to explore, that keeps tuning rock solid. Plus the ability to send that piezo signal separately to



a PA or acoustic amp for layers. But all this wouldn't count for much without the foundations in place.

While the action on our test guitar is a little high for us, the humbucker choices here feel right; the bridge rich and fat, the neck blooming and throaty, with definition. Dialling in the piezo adds air between notes with low end that's great for gentler, strummy tones and folkier places than you might expect. Then the coil-splits take out some low end if you wish (coil-splits always take away low end in our experience). Split alone, we're certainly not

talking Strat or Tele twang but some useful chiming mids with some high sizzle and cut a la P-90.

It's quite simply a stunningly versatile Les Paul – and now more people can enjoy Lifeson's combinations, and bring their own creative ideas to the table. Accessibility indeed.

**Rob Laing**

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

## ALSO TRY...

### PRS SE HOLLOWBODY II PIEZO

£1349

Another electric with enhanced upper fret access and piezo tones to mix with the pair of humbuckers, but here with the hollow-body tonal character.



### FENDER AMERICAN ACOUSTASONIC JAZZMASTER

£1749

A different take on the piezo/electric approach; this time with the emphasis on acoustic sounds via a piezo, transducer and Shawbucker combination.



### ESP LTD EC-1000 PIEZO

£1299

This piezo model is paired with the classic combo of a Seymour Duncan '59 and Seymour Duncan JB humbucker. A Floyd Rose single-cut is also available.

