

FIRST PLAY



**GRETSCH PLAYERS EDITION
6609 BROADKASTER**
£2,299

WHAT IS IT? Modernised take on classic double-cut semi, with centre block and Full'Tron pickups



**GRETSCH PLAYERS EDITION
G6659TG BROADKASTER JR**
£2,399

WHAT IS IT? Scaled-down single-cut semi with Bigsby and Full'Trons in Cadillac Green

The Spell Is Kast

Two great new additions to Gretsch's Players Edition 'Centre Block' range, with classic looks but a modern twist or two up their sleeves

Words Neville Marten **Photography** Neil Godwin

Who doesn't love the look of a Gretsch? They're big, bold and flashy and they scream rock 'n' roll – and that's rock 'n' roll of all flavours, from Eddie Cochran to George Harrison, Neil Young to Joe Perry, Billy Duffy to Johnny Marr and beyond. Trouble is, play a classic 6120 or Duo Jet and it can seem a bit, well, old-fashioned. And while the likes of Brian Setzer, Darryl Higham and Richard Hawley couldn't live without their own Gretsches' quirky controls and 50s playability, a growing number of players desire the brand's looks, sound and unmatched vibe, but also want something a tad more versatile and user-friendly.

Enter these latest Players Edition models with necks set lower into the body for improved access, higher-output Filter'Tron-style humbucking pickups (Full'Trons) and a modernised Bigsby vibrato where through-stringing replaces the notorious 'hooking the ball-end over a peg' system that scuppered any chance of a quick change. Mate these modern







1



2



3

1. The master volume on the lower horn is pure Gretsch, but we wonder if it's one anachronism too far on these, in all other respects, very modern looking, feeling and sounding guitars

2. Evoking 50s Cadillac style ornamentation, the 'V' stopbar tailpiece is another classic Gretsch motif. Paired with the company's Adjusto-Matic bridge it's a simple and workable design

3. Uprated in power and middle response, these Full-Tron pickups are Gretsch's first new US humbuckers since the 70s. They look great in their gold surrounds

tweaks with another recent innovation (for Gretsch, at any rate), the Centre Block range, and you have a set of guitars ready to compete with anything out there – in virtually any style.

Common to both models is those solid centre blocks (the blocks are spruce and, according to Gretsch, lighter and more toneful than maple), Full-Tron pickups, locking Gotoh tuners, Adjusto-Matic bridge and binding all round, including the f-holes. They both have exceptionally classy raised tortoid pickguards and the slightly simplified control layout of individual pickup volumes, single tone control, three-way selector and – the one remaining anachronism in our view – a master volume control mounted on the lower horn.

Gretsch model naming can be a little confusing so we asked our friends at Fender EMEA to clarify. "As with most Pro series Gretsches, each model variation is available in one colour," they told us, "although you could think of the Broadcasters as three model types with different finish appointments: Jr, Hardtail and Bigsby models, with two or four finish options each. So, one price for flames, Bigsby's, goldplating or combinations thereof, and a lower price to forego those things."

The full-size double-cut Broadcaster sits squarely in the ES-335 camp, with its slim body (44mm) and accessible (17th-fret) neck join. Available with or without Bigsby, ours comes with Gretsch's 'V' stopbar tailpiece and Adjusto-Matic bridge, rosewood fretboard and, like the Jr, tastefully aged 'neo-classical' thumbnail position markers. Although the smaller and therefore perhaps more 'rock'-orientated of the two, the Jr appears the more Gretsch-y with its gold hardware, Bigsby, ebony 'board and cool gold Broadcaster headstock nameplate. (The Broadcaster name, of course, was originally used on a Gretsch drum kit and was the reason why Fender had to change the name of its early solidbody from Broadcaster to Telecaster, thus causing the nameless 'Nocaster' in the process). Build quality on both guitars is stunning, the Cadillac Green of the Jr, in particular, a real head turner.

Feel & Sounds

With their 305mm (12-inch) fingerboard radius and 22 medium-jumbo frets on slim C-section necks, both guitars feel fresh and comfortable in the hand. And the fact that the necks sit deeper in the bodies making



4. The Cadillac Green Broadcaster Jr's Full'Trons are gold in gold surrounds. Note the Patent number (also shown overleaf) and double row of adjustable polepieces.
5. Nothing is spared when it comes to lavish appointments, with every conceivable edge bound, including the f-holes. Note the gold 'arrow' control knobs
6. The new style Bigsby with through-stringing of the bar is a not-before-time improvement that makes restringing your Gretsch a much less hair-pulling process

the pickups protrude a good deal less, too, adds to this more modern feel (our orange 6120 seems almost archaic by comparison). Surprisingly, the black guitar's larger body (16 inches as opposed to 14) makes it feel no more cumbersome on the lap or around the neck – the horn-mounted strap button helping no end with balance and positioning on the player's body. The thin bodies on both instruments hold them close to you, for an intimate and rewarding playing experience. Avoid looking in the mirror, though – we bet you can't!

As mentioned, a prime selling point is the all-new drive trains, the first new US-made Gretsch pickups since the 70s (Filter'Trons have been Gretsch's humbucking mainstay since the 50s). They're great-sounding units combining real punch with clarity and articulation – AC/DC's Malcolm Young to Brian Setzer in The Stray Cats is a pretty broad spectrum. For the Players Edition Centre Blocks, the Filter'Tron has become the Full'Tron, with greater output, punchier mids and a generally more up-to-date ethos.

A clean setting on our ubiquitous Fender Blues Junior elicits a hard-edged twang from the bridge'Tron, a warm but articulate jazz



note from the neck, and a Duane Eddy-ish clunk in the middle (very DeArmond-like). On an undistorted setting, both guitars sound very similar, but pile on some drive and the Jr's greater wood-to-body-size ratio begins to add more middle honk compared with the bigger guitar's slightly more open sound. The Bigsby could be adding to or subtracting from the sonic soup, but without otherwise identical instruments side by side it's hard to tell. 'No-load' tone pots mean that, when set wide open, the signal bypasses both pot and capacitor for the clearest possible tone, but knock it back from the notched 'open' position and it works like a normal control. Suffice it to say, both guitars leave a very pleasing impression on the ears as well as the eyes.

Verdict

"Who doesn't love the look of a Gretsch?" this review began. Well, we think even more will be seduced by these updated and uprated models, enticing a whole new flush of members to the Gretsch gang with their vastly improved player comfort and a range of tones that can cover anything other than the highest-gain metal. Japanese build quality is beyond reproach, and the range of options available means there's something for everyone, whether you prefer the diminutive Broadcaster Jr or feel more at home with a classic thinline semi round your neck. And if a Bigsby is one Gretsch-y step too far, you can forego that, too.

Gretsch is determined to shake the 'for rockabilly only' vibe of its instruments, and we think the Players Edition Centre Block series is set to do just that. Only one question remains: Cadillac Green or Bourbon Stain? **G**



GRETSCH G6609 PLAYERS EDITION BROADCASTER

PRICE: £2,299 (inc case)

ORIGIN: Japan

TYPE: Double-cutaway, thinline f-hole electric

BODY: Laminated maple with spruce centre block

NECK: Maple

SCALE LENGTH: 624.84mm (24.6")

NUT/WIDTH: Graph Tech Tusq, 43mm

FINGERBOARD: Ebony with aged

thumbnail inlays; 305mm (12") radius

FRETS: 22, medium-jumbo

HARDWARE: Gold Gretsch 'V' Stoptail, Adjusto-Matic bridge, Gotoh locking tuners, Schaller strap locks, gold 'arrow' control knobs

STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 51mm

ELECTRICS: 2x Gretsch Full'Tron pickups, master volume, 2x pickup volumes, tone, 3-way selector

WEIGHT (kg/lbs): 7/3.175

RANGE OPTIONS: G6609TFM Broadcaster (Bigsby, flame maple top, back and sides, w/ nickel hardware) and G6609TG Broadcaster (Bigsby gold-plated hardware), both £2,399

LEFT-HANDERS: No

FINISHES: Black, Dark Cherry Stain, Bourbon Stain, Vintage White

Fender EMEA

01342 331700

www.gretsch.com



9/10

PROS Great looker; lovely build; cool, versatile sounds; very slick for a 'large' guitar; fair value

CONS Is the horn-mounted master volume an anachronism too far?



GRETSCH G6659TG PLAYERS EDITION BROADCASTER JR

PRICE: £2,399 (inc case)

ORIGIN: Japan

TYPE: Single-cutaway, thinline f-hole electric

BODY: Laminated maple with spruce centre block

NECK: Maple

SCALE LENGTH: 624.84mm (24.6")

NUT/WIDTH: Graph Tech Tusq, 43mm

FINGERBOARD: Ebony with aged

thumbnail inlays, 305mm (12") radius

FRETS: 22, medium-jumbo

HARDWARE: Gold-plated 'string-through' Bigsby, Adjusto-Matic bridge, Gotoh locking tuners, Schaller strap locks, gold 'arrow' control knobs

STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 51mm

ELECTRICS: 2x Gretsch Full'Tron pickups, master volume, 2x pickup volumes, tone, 3-way selector

WEIGHT (kg/lbs): 7/3.175

RANGE OPTIONS: G6659TFM Broadcaster Jr, Dark Cherry Stain over flame maple w/ nickel hardware, £2,399

LEFT-HANDERS: No

FINISHES: Cadillac Green Metallic, Dark Cherry Stain



9/10

PROS Amazing looks; beautifully built; vintage and modern sounds; uprated playability; fair value

CONS As with the G6609 we could lose the master volume control