



Vintage Icon V100 & V6

£299 each

Just when we thought it was safe: a new slant on the whole ageing shebang from Vintage by Simon Bradley

Even if the artificial ageing might cause you to turn up your nose, you'll get a great tone and playability with both guitars



What's your stance on the ageing or relic processes offered by the likes of Fender, Gibson and Washburn? Chances are that you'll either hate or love the idea, with the latter view enhanced if you'd had the fortune to see such a guitar up close.

Fender's Time Machine process is exhaustive to say the least, resulting in a degree of artificial yet entirely convincing wear and tear. Holding a 1959 Relic Esquire, you can almost feel the near half-century of history.

The opposing view is simple: why? What's the point of spending a significant wedge of folding stuff to buy a beat up guitar when you could revel in any one of the more affordable standard guitars? A fair point too.

So, all things considered, how would you feel about a guitar that's been artificially aged, yet has no significant history – certainly when compared against the likes of Fender and Gibson – to speak of? Welcome two members of the Icon series, artificially aged versions of guitars already nestling in the arms of the Vintage range.

Icon V100

The very first thing you notice upon unpacking and picking up the V100 is the weight. Part of the very essence of

VINTAGE ICON V100	TEST RESULTS
Build quality	★★★★★
Playability	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ WE LIKED Great tone; reassuring weight ■ WE DISLIKED The shoddy finishing in places 	

Gibson's finest innovation is the sheer mass, and such is the weight of this single-cut that it actually passes the 'closed eyes' test alongside a Les Paul Standard. The construction is similar too, at least in terms of the wood used: a body capped with a sliver of flamed maple and ultimately comprising two pieces of mahogany, albeit with the join in the region of the rear pot cavity.

Although this is an obvious copy of a world-famous design, simple parody isn't necessarily the whole story behind this and other members of the Vintage range. Although the V100 is in the ballpark of a late fifties Les Paul, there's certainly no chance of anyone passing it off as the real thing.

That said, the real ace in the hole as far as both guitars here are concerned is the continuing influence of Trev Wilkinson. Subtle touches such as the authentic look of his WJ44 tuners (the green hue of the tulip pegs is especially

believable) against the just-about-perfect yellowing of the logo and inlay speaks volumes regarding the attention to detail within the obvious price-point parameters: even the headstock tapers in just the right way.

So, what about this ageing? "Well, everyone has their own idea as to how a guitar ages but the reality is that each one ages differently so there is no correct way of doing it," offers Wilkinson. "We needed to go over the top a little bit more than the Time Machine Closet Classic style but not quite as far as a Rory Gallagher! We do in fact start with a virtually finished guitar just before it is ready for the final top coat, we then distress it using files, 80 grit abrasive paper, sharpened screwdrivers, Scotchbrite pads. Then we sand it smooth and apply a satin lacquer to give it a duller look. This also has the effect of sealing the distressing so that whilst they may look old they do not get any worse as they sit on dealers' walls."

It has to be said that the overall satin finish of this example is below par – we can't find any excuse for splodges of finish and other imperfections. But we applaud the wear applied to the forearm area of the top, around all four controls and by the cutaway.

SOUNDS: Any ageing consequentially produces a smoothly worn neck and the V100 is no exception.

Demonstrating a wide 'C' rather than a narrow 'U' shape, the guitar plays like the real thing up to a point and, thanks to the woods plus Wilkinson's always impressive WVC humbuckers, sounds credible too.

The strings on our example seemed a tad on the old side (that might be taking the ageing a little too far!) but this actually helped in attaining all manner of Les Paul-esque tones: Page, Slash, Hawkins and many more. There's plenty of tonal push, neck pickup woof and bridge 'bucker bite, and we have no complaints as regards the fretwork either.

VINTAGE ICON V100

PRICE: £299
ORIGIN: China
TYPE: Single-cut, solidbody electric
BODY: Mahogany with flame maple top
NECK: Mahogany, glued-in
SCALE LENGTH: 628mm (24.75-inches)
NUT/WIDTH: Plastic/43mm
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood
FRETS: 22, medium
HARDWARE: Tuneomatic-style bridge, stud tailpiece, Wilkinson Deluxe WJ44 tuners, all chrome-plated
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 52mm
ELECTRICS: Two covered Wilkinson WVC humbuckers, three-way toggle; two volume, two-tone
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 4.2/9.2
OPTIONS: The standard V100 models start at £239, with the V99 costing £189
LEFT-HANDERS: No, but both the standard V100 (£239) and V99 (£199) ranges offer them
FINISHES: Distressed cherry sunburst, distressed honeyburst (as reviewed)
JHS
0113 286 5381
www.jhs.co.uk

The rivals

ICON V100
 Epiphone Les Paul 100 £299
 Cruiser LS950 £199
 Gould GS240 £185
Epi's LP100 has an alder top, but performance is pretty close to that of a 'real' LP. More of a Custom than a Standard, the LS950 provides the classic arctic white Les Paul vibe at a fraction of the price. Gould's slimmed-down basswood body model is a good example of quality on a budget from the Orient



There's plenty of tonal push and bridge 'bucker bite from the Icon V100

VINTAGE ICON V100 & V6 £299 EACH

ELECTRICS  GUITARIST INTERACTIVE



VINTAGE ICON V6

As V100 except...

PRICE: £299

TYPE: Double-cut solidbody electric

BODY: Poplar

NECK: Maple, bolt-on

SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5-inches)

HARDWARE: Wilkinson WVC vibrato, WJ55 E-Z-Lok tuners, all chrome

STRING SPACING,

BRIDGE: 54mm

ELECTRICS: Three

Wilkinson WVS single-

coils, one volume, two

tones, five-way lever

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3/6.6

OPTIONS: The standard

V6 models cost £179

LEFT-HANDERS: No, but both the standard V6

left-hander costs £185

FINISHES: Distressed

Woodstock white,

distressed 'Firenza' red

(as reviewed)

The rivals

ICON V6

Squier Standard Strat

from £209

Stagg S350 from £129

Encore KC3 from £115

The Squier Strat

consistently tops sales

charts and for good

reason: it's difficult to

argue with the weight

of this Fender brand

and its history, not to

mention the excellent

performance and

wealth of classic tones.

One of myriad guitars

'influenced' by the good

ol' Strat, Stagg offers a

sketchy spec comprising

three single-coils, a

solid alder body and

maple neck. Another

from the JHS stable,

you certainly get what

you pay for with an

Encore guitar. Still,

we'd certainly suggest

that, if in the market

for your first electric

guitar, Encore must be

on your list



Knopfler-like twang and SRV's aggressive tones are on tap from the V6's single-coils



The V6 features Wilkinson WJ55 E-Z-Lok tuners

Icon V6

Thanks to Fender's ceaseless toil to protect its trademarks, it's the headstock of this otherwise instantly recognisable double-cut that gives it away. In fact, only the front of the paddle has a gloss finish; the remainder of the guitar is wholly matt.

Although the finish of this example is described as 'Firenza' red, we don't think it sails quite as close to the wind as the other option, Woodstock white. And although the ageing of the poplar body is a tad zealous in its placement, getting down to the bare wood is a vital part of the process that has been respected here.

The mint-green hue of an old three-ply white/black/white pickguard has been recreated too, and fixtures such as the vibrato and blade tips and knobs (which wouldn't turn green over time, of course) are discoloured in just the right way, with the chrome Wilkinson parts benefiting from a restrained session with the steel wool. There's no faux rust here clogging up the saddles, which we prefer, and even though the overly thick rosewood 'board compromises whatever authenticity Vintage may have aimed for, the guitar plays very nicely indeed. We can even forgive the rather nasty turmeric

VINTAGE ICON V6	TEST RESULTS
Build quality	★★★★★
Playability	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★
<p>■ WE LIKED The cool Strat-like sounds; attention to detail all round</p> <p>■ WE DISLIKED The somewhat haphazard placement of wear</p>	

yellow hue that's been applied to the majority of bare wood...


SOUNDS: Courtesy of a trio of WVS single-coils we can again report that the gamut of associated tones is present, all the way from SRV's neck pickup aggression to Knopfler's glassy twang and beyond. The level of sheer treble on offer should you need it is most inspiring, and if you intend to use this through a super-loud amp, you may need to have an ambulance standing by. Great fun though. It's also worth mentioning that the pivot vibrato operates in a satisfyingly valid manner too and we really couldn't find much to grumble about tone-wise, all things considered.

Verdict

We're going to throw yet another catchphrase into the pot here: brand

snobbery. We have to concede to virtually dismissing these two guitars before we'd even seen them... and we'd wager that a number of you reading this would feel the same.

However, take it from us that both are proper instruments and, irrespective of your stance on the whole ageing concept, the price of £299 compares favourably indeed with the inferior (in our opinion) Epiphone LP100. Any working player who requires a dependable back-up to their favourite Les Paul or Strat should be stoked that there's another viable choice to consider alongside Epiphone and Squier, and even if the artificial ageing might cause you to turn up your nose, you'll get a great tone and playability with both guitars. We'd opt for the V100 as our personal pick of the two, but such is the appeal of the V6 that we may well take them both home.

Our snobbery led us to assume that we'd be forced to lay into these guitars. We were wrong, and you should ensure you don't make the same mistake. 

Vintage Icon V100

Guitarist RATING ★★★★★

Vintage Icon V6

Guitarist RATING ★★★★★