



Gretsch G5191TMS Tim Armstrong Electromatic Hollow Body £1,198

Here's one pimped punk classic that could make your day. But don't you dare call it pink... **by Ed Mitchell**

It's been a couple of years since Gretsch first honoured Rancid frontman and guitarist, Tim Armstrong, with a signature Electromatic Series model based on his beat-to-hell, 70s Baldwin-era Country Club. Now, Gretsch has pulled the trigger on a new version of Armstrong's Korean-made guitar, offered with a choice of trapeze tailpiece or Bigsby vibrato for the first time, and a flat pink primer-style finish with a fishy sounding name. Yeah, in the USA, tough lads that won't admit they like girly stuff substitute 'pink' for the decidedly less palatable

sounding 'man salmon'. Daft, really. No-one ever gave Elvis a hard time about his pink '55 Cadillac Fleetwood 60. In the context of rock 'n' roll at least, pink paint like this is pretty damn cool, and Armstrong's Man Salmon hue isn't a million miles from the Shell Pink sprayed on Strats back in the day. Anyhow, it's just a colour. You either like it or you don't.

Beneath the finish lies a big hollowbody constructed from sheets of five-ply laminated maple. Peer through the bound f-holes, and you'll spy two long wooden tone bars running along the inside of the guitar's

back. There are two identical bars on the underside of the Electromatic's top. These back and top bars are connected by a couple of sound posts positioned under either end of the bridge area. It's this robust construction method that contributes to the guitar's impressive sustain and bright acoustic tone. It also makes this hollow instrument feel almost indestructible. You certainly never feel you have to handle it with kid gloves.

The slim-profile, glued-in one-piece maple neck is teamed with a 305mm radius rosewood fingerboard and 22 medium

jumbo frets. The well-cut graphite top nut is aided and abetted by a zero fret, a feature carried over from Tim's original Country Club. No matter how you feel about a zero fret, in this case it contributes to a comfortably low action from the open-chord positions right the way up the 'board. So, don't knock it 'til you've tried it.

Moving on, a pair of Black Top Filter'Tron humbuckers provide this Electromatic's amplified voice via two volumes, two tones, a master volume and three-way pickup selector toggle switch. The gold finish applied to the Bigsby vibrato, Adjusto-Matic bridge, strap retainer knobs and Grover tuners, adds to the Marmite vibe of the guitar's aesthetic. The absence of a Bigsby option was the biggest grumble about Tim's black Electromatic signature model. To be fair, that's because his old Country Club has a trapeze tailpiece holding his strings in place. As you can deduce from our pretty pictures, you can now lay out the extra lolly for a licensed Bigsby B60G vibrato. It would



The Rivals

It might be half the price of the Gretsch, but **Epiphone's Emperor Swingster** (£549) is a definite rival. Featuring series/parallel switching options and a licensed Bigsby with Chet Atkins-spec long wire arm, it punches way above its weight in tone and playability. For Gretsch-like tone in a smaller package see the twin-humbucker, vibrato-equipped **Italia Maranello '61**. Also at £549, it's a bit of a tone monster, and comes in Trans Blue and Trans Orange finish options. You don't get a Bigsby, but **Gibson's ES-137 Classic** (approx £1,499) offers oodles of old-school tone from a pair of Gibson humbuckers. It's great for punk, blues, rockabilly – you name it

be good to see this option extended to the matt black finish model, too...

Sounds

The two Black Top Filter'Tron humbuckers fitted to Tim's guitar are modelled on the units on his original Country Club. Tim's Rancid bandmate Lars Frederiksen thumps out riffs and powerchords on an Epiphone Les Paul Custom in the studio and a Gibson SG when playing live. Now we understand why Tim likes these pickups so much. The G5191's brash-sounding bridge pickup provides the perfect counterpoint to all that bottom-end grunt. It'll never



The B60G Bigsby and Black Top Filter'Trons are a recipe for classic Gretsch tone

The tough construction makes it less susceptible to unwanted feedback than other full-depth hollowbodies

get buried in the mix, that's for sure. Flicking the selector switch and combining both 'buckers coaxes out a decent rockabilly tone, while the neck unit works well for blues licks and jazz comping. All that laminated maple helps prevent muddiness in the neck position, while the guitar's tough construction seems to make it less susceptible to unwanted feedback than other full-depth hollowbodies we've tried.

Verdict

You don't have to be a Tim Armstrong fan, or a punk, to fall for the charms of the G5191TMS. In fact, a big pink Gretsch with gold hardware and a Bigsby vibrato is even more likely to attract the attention of guitarists on the rockabilly scene. Those guys and gals will appreciate the fact

that they're getting a whole load of Gretsch DNA for a good few hundred sheets less than the company's Japanese-made Professional Series models. The excellent playability and versatile tonal range of the G5191TMS are the icing on a guitar that, frankly, looks like it's made out of cake. Who says you can't be pretty in punk?

The Bottom Line

We like: Well-constructed; excellent playability; bags of eye candy

We dislike: We'd like to see the Bigsby available on the black G5191, too

Guitarist says: A pink Gretsch is a bit of a rarity. Tim Armstrong's new baby redresses the balance

Gretsch G5191TMS Tim Armstrong Electromatic Hollow Body

PRICE: £1,198

ORIGIN: Korea

TYPE: Single-cutaway hollowbody

BODY: 5-ply maple back, top and sides

NECK: Maple, glued-in

SCALE LENGTH: 618mm (24.33")

NUT/WIDTH: Graphite/43mm

FINGERBOARD: Rosewood, acrylic block inlays, 305mm (12") radius

FRETS: 22, medium jumbo

HARDWARE: Gold-plated licensed Bigsby B60G vibrato, Adjusto-Matic bridge with rosewood base, Grover machineheads

STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 52mm

ELECTRICS: 2x Gretsch Black Top Filter'Tron humbuckers, 3-way pickup selector toggle switch, individual pickup volume and tone controls

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.4/7.6

RANGE OPTIONS: G5191MS with trapeze tailpiece and Man Salmon finish (£1,090); G5191BK with trapeze tailpiece in matt black finish (£1,090)

LEFT-HANDERS: G5191TMSLH with (right-handed) Bigsby (£1,354); G5191MSLH with trapeze tailpiece £1,246; G5191BKLH with trapeze tailpiece and matt black finish (£1,246)

FINISHES: Man Salmon

Fender GBI

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www.gretschguitars.com

Test results

Build quality	★★★★★
Playability	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★