







## FIRST PLAY



**CHAPMAN ML1 PRO  
TRADITIONAL**  
£869

**WHAT IS IT?** Modern bolt-on with numerous high-end tweaks



**CHAPMAN ML2 PRO  
MODERN**  
£1,049

**WHAT IS IT?** Neck-through single-cut with liquid playability

# Crowd Pleasers

Conceived by YouTube star Rob Chapman with input from his online community, the new 2017 range boasts impressive modern spec at tidy prices

**Words** Dave Burrluck **Photography** Neil Godwin

**T**here's a strong and welcome whiff of people power when it comes to Chapman guitars. Brand founder, Rob (aka the Monkey Lord), isn't a dusty tonewood tappin' guitar maker; he's a guitar-toting internet celebrity-cum-entrepreneur who's gone from creating a smattering of electrics in 2009 to a full-blown range of some 29 new models. "The culmination of 18 months worth of feedback, comments, chats and meetings with the guitar-playing public," says Chapman Guitars' MD, Matt Hornby. The guitars are now available in over 20 countries worldwide.

The range is split into three tiers – Standard, Pro and Signature. We selected a duo of Pro models that start with classic benchmarks then give them a modernist makeover. The ML1 Pro Traditional, in this 'naked' ultra-thin natural satin finish, is about as raw as it gets. The light 'swamp' ash body (35mm deep at the rim with a maximum depth of 45.6mm) has a typical thick, wavy-grained figure that is smooth to the touch but you can certainly feel the grain. The smoother satin back of the maple neck feels equally as good – this whole thing feels like a custom shop construct, not a product from the Korean World Music factory that builds for numerous brands, including PRS (SE range)





## The ML1 has just about everything going for it: weight, acoustic resonance and positive playability

and certain Guild Newark St models. There's a PRS-ish aspect to the top carve with a flatter centre than many, its thinner horns adding to the modernist vibe. The edge radius is tight, but we have a good rib-cage cut adding to the sculptural feel, while smaller details such as the recessed back covers and washers for the four neck screws continue the classy vibe.

The reversed and pointed-tipped Tele-style headstock boasts Hipshot rear-locking tuners. The two-post vibrato is unnamed but features a sharply machined brass block with deep-drilled string anchor holes and brass saddles with what appears to be a slightly textured plating. Simplistic, stripped-down quality applies to the electrics, too: a trio of Chapman Venus Witch single coils (with Alnico 5 rod magnets), direct mounted to the body (with height adjustment), master volume and tone, and the ubiquitous S-style five-way pickup selector with the output passing to a side-mounted socket securely fitted to its oval metal plate. Schaller-style strap locks are standard.

Equally obvious in terms of its original inspiration, the ML2 Pro Modern nonetheless impresses with a sharp, if not sharper

1. The reverse headstock here will have a subtle effect on the bending feel of the strings, not the actual string tension







build. Based on a maple through-neck with mahogany wings and nicely violin-like dished centre-jointed maple top, it's thinner than a Les Paul with a similar depth to the ML1 (around 36mm at the rim with a max depth of 45mm). It comes with a more substantial weight, but not off the scale at 8.4lbs. There's a slight PRS-like scoop in the treble cavity and a sharp-pointed horn – both enhancing its modernism – and again a custom shop vibe is suggested with the matt jet black ebony 'board and 24 stainless-steel frets. With the almost faded blue colouration of the maple top and muted black hardware, it all ties in smartly. Less so perhaps the rather foreshortened headstock with a brown striped ebony facing – it doesn't tie in colour-wise and its square top looks uncharacteristically unimaginative.

Powering here is from a pair of black-coiled Stentorian humbuckers, again using Alnico 5 magnets and mounted directly to the body without mounting rings. The cavities are very cleanly cut, but in combination with the raked back neck pitch, the bridge pickup does sit rather high – its baseplate is virtually in line with the face of the body. Both pickups are set

a little further than most from the strings and need firmer support underneath to raise them.

### Feel & Sounds

With such sharp, clean presentation, there's a danger that – like many modern instruments – these could feel rather sterile. They really don't. The ML1 has just about everything going for it: a light weight, nice snappy acoustic resonance, shallow flattened C profile neck (around 20.6mm at the 1st fret, 21.7mm at the 12th) and hugely positive playability. Despite two string trees and that reverse headstock, tuning stability from the vibrato is really good: up-bend is limited to around one tone on the G string; down is virtually to slack.

Like the ML1, the ML2 ships with 0.009s, which feel slightly floppy; we'd go up a gauge here. But the supplied slinky setup is hard to criticise, especially if you want a fast drive. The neck profile is pretty similar and virtually untapered (around 20.5mm at the 1st fret, 20.7mm at the 12th). All the controls fall easily under your hand – they look a little cramped, but in use are intuitive and fast, while the Tele-style knurled knobs are very grippable, not

2. The ML1 Pro is equipped with a good-quality two-post vibrato with push-fit, tension adjustable arm, deep-drilled brass block and saddles

3. Stainless steel frets are fitted on both these Pro Series Chapmans – they'll last longer than standard frets





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4. Rarely used on solidbodies outside of the modern-rock 'shred' world, and found throughout the Chapman range, a through-neck like this potentially adds a smooth sustain and, some believe, brightness and attack. The body 'wings' under the maple top are mahogany

5. Another 'Marmite' feature, a volute strengthens the weakest, thinnest point of the neck, especially when there is a cavity to adjust the two-way truss rod, as here

6. Rather un-single-cut-like, the controls nonetheless fall right under your picking hand. Here, we have two volumes and a master tone with pull-switch to split both humbuckers, voicing the inner single coils



## With its hot bridge pickup, the ML2 quite is a ride for driving a cranked Vox or Marshall

least for pulling up the tone switch to voice the pickups' split coils. It's these tuned-in features that make these models seem more like artist-designed guitars, which in reality they are.

Irrespective of the design tweaks, plugged in, the ML1 is a 'Strat' through and through. And if you prefer yours on the brighter side, dry, crisp and resonant, then you've hit pay dirt. While many of us might wrestle with a big ol' 50s-style neck, heavy strings and big actions, this is the antithesis – it's a fast player with a sensible 'board radius that doesn't fret out and the neck feels as comfortable for thumb-around as it does with thumb-behind. It almost has an active 'edge' to the crisp highs, which can easily be tamed by the master tone: it's springy and funky, does a great Edge or equally Nile Rodgers studio-Strat. If you asked players what they don't like about a Strat, this might well be the answer. It would make a superb platform for a pair of hot PAFs, too.

The ML2 drops right into the modern-rock single-cut slot. Yes, it's thinner than a more classic LP-style – both in size and sound – but with the hot bridge pickup selected, it's quite a ride for driving a cranked Vox or Marshall, with a couple of boost pedals for good measure. These pickup heights are a little low, but we're not sure it matters. Likewise, the splits (which voice both inner single coils





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of the 'buckers) hardly add woody 'Strat' – they're altogether more pristine – and dialling in a few Helix LT presets with some dense modulation and reverb, the ML2 really sings in a contemporary fashion. A modern single-cut that is an effortless player but with a big kick.

### Verdict

Helped by direct-to-retailer pricing, both guitars offer a spec that's hard to beat at these prices – and you get good cases, too. The ML1 Traditional is very nicely put together: a crisply voiced modern Strat-alike (though far from a clone) that's light, lively and resonant. It's a slinky player with obvious potential for any modders, although it's ready to funk and rock straight from that case. The ML2 takes the single-cut platform but – in a more ergonomic size – adds a through-neck, different but very viable control positions, and creates a lighter but nicely hot single-cut voice. Neither shoot for vintage voicing, but the ML2 does suggest a thinner, brighter Les Paul Deluxe style, and both are directly aimed at effects-savvy players who are after a fast playing platform with plenty of pro-spec features that won't break the bank. Yes, the pickup mounting on the ML2 could do with a little more thought (or simply conventional pickup rings), but it doesn't ruin the fun. Really good guitars. **G**



### CHAPMAN ML1 PRO TRADITIONAL

**PRICE:** £869 (inc case)  
**ORIGIN:** Korea  
**TYPE:** Offset double-cutaway solidbody electric  
**BODY:** Swamp ash, carved top with natural edge  
**NECK:** Maple, bolt-on  
**SCALE LENGTH:** 648mm (25.5")  
**NUT:** Graph Tech Tusq/42.25mm  
**FINGERBOARD:** Maple, 12th fret black Infinity inlay, 250mm (9.84") radius  
**FRETS:** 22, jumbo stainless steel  
**HARDWARE:** Chapman 2-Point Tremolo with Brass Block with Brass Saddles, Hipshot Grip-Lock Open-back tuners – chrome-plated  
**STRING SPACING, BRIDGE:** 53mm  
**ELECTRICS:** 3x Chapman Witch single coils, 5-position lever pickup selector switch, master volume and tone controls  
**WEIGHT (kg/lb):** 3.3/7.26  
**OPTIONS:** None  
**RANGE OPTIONS:** The ML1 Pro Modern (£969) features dual humbuckers, hardtail bridge and through-neck. The Standard series ML1 Traditional retails at £429  
**LEFT-HANDERS:** No  
**FINISHES:** Natural (as reviewed), White Dove – satin finish

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9/10

**PROS** Build, weight, playability and modern voicing

**CONS** Not the 'woodiest' Strat-alike we've ever heard



### CHAPMAN ML2 PRO MODERN

**PRICE:** £1,049 (inc case)  
**ORIGIN:** Korea  
**TYPE:** Single-cutaway, solidbody electric  
**BODY:** Carved maple top, mahogany wings  
**NECK:** Maple (3-piece quarter-sawn) through neck  
**SCALE LENGTH:** 635mm (25")  
**NUT/WIDTH:** Graph Tech Black Tusq XL/43.6mm  
**FINGERBOARD:** Ebony, pearl bars and 12th fret pearl Infinity inlay, 305mm (12") radius  
**FRETS:** 24, jumbo stainless steel  
**HARDWARE:** Chapman tune-o-matic with stud tailpiece, Hipshot Grip-Lock Open tuners – black-plated  
**STRING SPACING, BRIDGE:** 51mm  
**ELECTRICS:** 2x Chapman Stentorian humbuckers, 3-way toggle pickup selector switch, individual volumes and master tone (w/ pull/push coil-split switch)  
**WEIGHT (kg/lb):** 3.83/8.4  
**OPTIONS:** None  
**RANGE OPTIONS:** The Standard series ML2 Modern costs £449  
**LEFT-HANDERS:** No  
**FINISHES:** Dusk (as reviewed), Fireburst – satin finish

8/10

**PROS** Build and playability; modern hot 'n' light single-cut sounds

**CONS** The pickup mounting needs some attention