



Hagstrom Viking, Deluxe & F200P

£419, £419 & £329

After an absence of almost 25 years, Hagstrom is back; this time with electrics that mix past character with modern performance and competitive pricing by Paul Day



These days the guitar-making industry is looking more and more to the past for inspiration. Nostalgia is big business and many old designs are being revived, not to mention the return of numerous brand names, some better known than others.

Hagstrom falls firmly into the more famous category, having been Sweden's foremost guitar manufacturer for over 20 years from 1958. Now the company has decided that, after almost a quarter of a century's absence, it's time to re-enter the electric arena, using past knowledge and experience allied to modern, cost-friendly Chinese production. The new range naturally capitalises on Hagstrom's history and pedigree, with many models re-creating earlier best sellers. But these have been brought up to date via careful component choice, as the company is seriously targeting all markets, not just those who have fond memories of the brand the first time around.

Viking

The reincarnation of this classic twin-cutaway Hagstrom semi is based on the seventies version, rather than the earlier Fender-headstocked design that debuted in 1965.

The headstock faithfully apes the elegant original and the ornate image is enhanced by multi-layer pearl binding. The Hagstrom-branded tuners employ art deco-styled buttons that are slightly smaller than those seen in the seventies, making them more finger/string winder-friendly.

From the off, Hagstrom favoured synthetic fingerboards and this desire to be different continues. The Viking's seemingly silky smooth ebony fingerboard is actually what the company calls Resinator Wood, a timber composite apparently embodying all the plus points of the real thing. It hosts 22 reasonably polished medium gauge frets and,

HAGSTROM VIKING	TEST RESULTS
Build quality	★★★★★
Playability	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ WE LIKED Easy playability; classy looks ■ WE DISLIKED Pickups are very polite and lack a bit of character 	

although some ends would benefit from a bit more attention, the end result is sufficiently sleek and speedy. A graphite-type nut minimises string snagging, while equally spaced, optimum depth slots contribute to pleasant playability.

The truss rod is another piece of Hagstrom history, reviving the patented H-expander design. This twist-free system meant Hagstrom necks came slimmer than standard, but these days more meat is necessary for mainstream appeal. The Viking's black-finished neck accordingly assumes a contemporary and comfortable 'C'-profile. It's actually a more major departure from the past, as the birch original was a bolt-on type, but now it's maple and glued in. This method allows the body to join at the 19th fret, three further on than before for improved access.

Another significant alteration is that the body uses laminated maple rather than birch and is no longer hollow, featuring instead a full-length solid centre section like Gibson's classic ES-335. Shape and size have stayed the same, although the different neck join moves pickups and bridge further up the body, creating a more spacious feel and image, although the extra wood onboard means the modern Viking weighs 4kg: oof! Classy looks are enhanced by the impressively applied, high-gloss polyester sunburst finish, complemented by edge binding.

The Viking's body is no longer hollow, featuring instead a full-length solid centre section like Gibson's classic ES-335

The period-correct pickguard borders a brace of chrome-covered HJ50 humbuckers apparently voiced to suit large hollow-body guitars. Gibson-style knobs depart from tradition, topping the familiar twin volume, twin tone pot quartet that straddles the treble-side f-hole. In the seventies the Viking sported a three-way tone switch on the left horn, while the pickup selector was over on the right. The recreation dispenses with the former and instead moves the pickup selector to this more logical location.

The original wooden-base bridge has been replaced by a twin stud-mounted variation on the time-tested tuneomatic, offering extra leeway in terms of intonation adjustment. Strings then travel on to a sizeable trapeze tailpiece that's a direct replica of the original Hagstrom design, complete with plastic badge carrying the company crest

SOUNDS: Played unplugged, the Viking is respectably resonant, with a fair degree of natural sustain and mid-dominated tonality. Clean power reveals evenly balanced humbuckers in terms of tone and output. The neck pickup is plummy, with a smooth-

edged top end, while the bridge position adds appropriate bite that's sweet rather than spiky. Selecting both supplies some nasal overtones, but a generally woody, well-defined character comes across via all three settings.

Nicely graduated volume controls allow subtle shifts in emphasis, but the tone pots tend to be sudden death in operation. Introducing some dirt puts the Viking in blues/rock mode to quite good effect, but heaping on more gain merely muddies the sound, fostering feedback and swamping an already restrained treble response.

HAGSTROM VIKING

PRICE: £419
ORIGIN: China
TYPE: Twin-cutaway semi-acoustic electric
BODY: Laminated maple
NECK: Maple, glued-in
SCALE LENGTH: 629mm (24.75-inches)
NUT/WIDTH: Synthetic/42.5mm
FINGERBOARD: Bound wood composite, pearl position dots
FRETS: 22, medium
HARDWARE: Six-saddle bridge & separate trapeze tailpiece, Hagstrom tuners, chrome-plated
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 51mm
ELECTRICS: Two humbuckers, two volumes, two tones, three-way pickup selector
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 4.0/8.8
OPTIONS: None
RANGE OPTIONS: Viking Deluxe (laminated flame maple, pearl position blocks)
LEFT-HANDERS: Yes (no extra charge)
FINISHES: Tobacco sunburst (as reviewed), black, wild cherry transparent
Hagstrom UK&I
08701 436736
www.hagstrom-guitars.co.uk

The rivals

VIKING
Ibanez AS103NT £549
Vintage Advance AV1 £349
Yamaha SA500 £299
The all-maple Ibanez AS103NT cuts a stylish figure that sets it apart from the usual ES-335 clones. The Vintage Advance AV1 offers an offset-cutaway. Yamaha's SA500 is cast in the ES-335 mould, but art deco soundholes and a novel six-section tailpiece endow some welcome individuality.



HAGSTROM DELUXE	TEST RESULTS
Build quality	★★★★★
Playability	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★

■ **WE LIKED** Playability; weighty performance
 ■ **WE DISLIKED** Switch and control positions could pose playing problems

HAGSTROM DELUXE

As Viking except...
TYPE: Single-cutaway solid electric
BODY: Mahogany, maple top
NECK: Mahogany, glued-in
HARDWARE: Six-saddle bridge & separate tailpiece, Hagstrom tuners, chrome-plated
ELECTRICS: Two humbuckers, master volume & tone, three-way toggle pickup selector
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 4.0/8.8
RANGE OPTIONS: Deluxe-F (semi-solid, trapeze tailpiece)
FINISHES: Mahogany with sparkle top in blue (as reviewed), black, gold, red, silver; also with flame maple veneer top in amber sunburst, cherry sunburst

→ **Deluxe**

The Deluxe doesn't resemble any previous model, although the single-cutaway styling hints at Hagstrom's earliest electrics: the plastic-coated Deluxe and Standard six-strings.

The glued-in neck is virtually identical to the Viking's in terms of scale, size and shape, but is made from mahogany instead of maple. A small heel keeps joint mass to a minimum, but the body's shallow single-cutaway offers only adequate reach to the dusty end. The hardware is the same as on the Viking and the fingerboard is equally alike, although here the fret ends are better finished and playability is even better.

The mahogany body boasts a 10mm deep carved maple top, finished in a fetching blue sparkle that contrasts the otherwise all-brown livery. Size-wise, the Deluxe is akin to a slightly scaled-up Les Paul and feels quite muscular, weighing the same as the larger Viking. It's well balanced, however, and a rear waist contour contributes to a snug fit.

Pickups are again twin humbuckers, but this time they're a matched set of the company's Custom 60 design, with Alnico 5 magnets lurking under the chrome covers. On this example the bridge pickup has been mounted slightly crooked, which unfortunately is still a frequent failing.

Controls are limited to master volume and tone, plus a three-way pickup selector. The latter is on the left upper bout as usual, but too close to the neck pickup and therefore prone to strum-induced, accidental switching. The two controls are also unnecessarily adjacent to the bridge humbucker,



The bridge is unique, but the controls are a little cramped

again running the risk of unwanted alteration. This layout looks quite cramped too, leaving an appreciable unbroken expanse of body front.

The bridge is the same as that seen on the Viking, but the tailpiece keeping close attendance is another component from the company's past. String ends are secured in six chunky metal blocks, all sited on a clear plastic baseplate and hidden beneath a curved metal cover held in place by screws.

SOUNDS: The Deluxe has a toppy acoustic tonality and isn't short on natural sustain. The humbuckers aren't as polite as those on the Viking; they have higher output and a more cutting mid-range, although the neck pickup balances this with heavy lows and sinewy treble. The extra attack is more apparent in the bridge position, where it delivers a well-defined top end that's ideal for fluent soloing. Switching to the centre selection yields a healthy blend of both, supplying chime and punch in equal measure.

The Deluxe deals with dirt very efficiently and even with large amounts of gain the signal stays solid, with surprisingly good note separation. This guitar is one that actually sounds like it looks and feels: weighty.

F200P

This six-string revives the styling first seen on the Hagstrom II and III solids introduced around 1965, the model title referring to their US designations, the F200 and F300. As on the originals, the body is a blend of Fender Strat and Gibson SG, marrying the former's offset cutaway outline to the latter's sharp horns and bevelled edges.

These Hagstroms started out with a bolt-on Fender-style neck, and hardware that included single-coil pickups, multi-switch circuitry and an own-design vibrato tailpiece. The seventies brought a change to humbuckers, conventional controls and a three tuners-per-side headstock.

The new F200P borrows from both versions while adding a few updates. The headstock, tuners and nut are as for the rest of the range, likewise the Resinator Wood fingerboard, although here it's unbound. This adds some Fender flavour and loses 0.5mm off the width, but otherwise the glued-in nato neck adopts essentially the same shaping as those of the other two.

Fret count is reduced to 21, although the scale stays Gibson-like, with the more Fender-ish (648mm, 25.5in) longer length reserved for the bolt-on maple neck of its triple pickup-

The rivals

DELUXE	
Ibanez ARC300	£329
Washburn W1200	£379
Yamaha AES420	£299

The ARC300 offers a figured maple front, fancy abalone block position markers and some own-design hardware. The W1200 employs distinctive single-cutaway styling on a solid that includes genuine Seymour Duncans, Buzz Feiten tuning and Voice Contour controls. The Yamaha AES range was among the first to employ scaled-down archtop single-cutaway styling on a solid six-string, the AES420 being a competitively priced example.



HAGSTROM F200P

As Viking except...
PRICE: £329
TYPE: Double-cutaway solid electric
BODY: Mahogany
NECK: Nato, glued-in
NUT/WIDTH: Synthetic/42mm
FRETS: 21, medium-slim
HARDWARE: Six-saddle vibrato unit, Hagstrom tuners, chrome-plated
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 53mm
ELECTRICS: Two single-coils, master volume & tone, three-way lever pickup selector
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.5/7.7
RANGE OPTIONS: F20 (two humbuckers), F200 (two humbuckers, fixed bridge), F300 (three single-coils), F301 (two single-coils, one humbucker)
FINISHES: Black (as reviewed), cream (with tortoiseshell scratchplate)

The rivals

F200P
 St Blues Mississippi
 Bluesmaster £439
 Vintage Advance AV6
 £319
 Wilson Bros VM-75 £599
The St Blues Mississippi Bluesmaster blends Gibson and Fender influences on a single-cutaway solid equipped with twin P-90 pickups and a fixed bridge. Part of the Trevor Wilkinson-designed Vintage Advance series, the Fender-ish AV6 totes a trio of P-90-style humbuckers, some clever circuitry and a vibrato. The Wilson Bros VM-75 carries The Ventures' logo and combines twin P-90s with a Strat-style vibrato on a reversed Mosrite body.

→ equipped F300 and F301 friends.

The mahogany body's offset cutaways encourage upper end excursions, but the deep neck/body joint puts more wood here than might be expected. The bevelled edge contouring on front and back increases comfort and makes the body seem slimmer, although weight is a pretty normal 3.5kg.

The review example is in all encompassing, mirror finish black polyester with a black pearl scratchplate. The latter keeps the curvy lines of the sixties' original, although it's cut a little crudely in places. It carries the simple control complement of master volume and tone plus a three-way pickup selector. The latter is a lever type, partnering Strat-like knobs that take the Fender influence further.

The scratchplate surrounds a pair of direct-mounted, H90 soapbar-style single-coils sporting Alnico 5 magnets. On the review guitar, both pickups tilt at a very different angle to string slope, so some major adjustments are required under each to improve matters.

The Full Contact System vibrato works on a knife-edge principle, with a body-mounted block providing a pivot point for the bridge plate. The latter carries six lock-down saddles and string height is determined by individual slotted turrets, which are also adjustable and lockable. The arm fits into a nylon sleeved bushing, with swing tension determined by a grub screw pressure adjuster. As supplied, the arm points skywards and needs bending into a more player-friendly position. This is a responsive unit that offers maximum sustain and, once strings have settled in, return to pitch consistency is better than expected.

The Strat-style jackplate echoes a feature of the original Hagstroms, although back then these used a slightly smaller version, so this is not a copy component. Another departure from the past is the upper strap button, which has moved from the horn to



The H90 soapbars don't disappoint, capable of very useful tones

HAGSTROM F200P	TEST RESULTS
Build quality	★★★★★
Playability	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ WE LIKED Excellent sustain; pokey P-90 pickups ■ WE DISLIKED Poor pickup mounting; some tuning stability problems 	

behind the neck heel. This tends to tilt the guitar forwards and it would be better back where it started.

SOUNDS: The F200P has a very impressive natural resonance, and powering up proves that the H90 soapbars don't disappoint. They deliver the punch and power expected from this design. The neck pickup is ideal for raunchy rock and blues, while the grittier character of the bridge unit makes for even rawer sounds. Having both pickups on hollows things out a little to create another very useable option. These pickups also respond well to sensible amounts of gain, being capable of very edgy, aggressive tones.

Verdict

Reviving any brand name needs to be done properly or not at all and this trio demonstrate that Hagstrom is taking its comeback seriously.

Although ostensibly similar to its predecessor, the Viking has been made decidedly more ES-335 than ES-330. The end result is an impressive semi, although pickup voicing may prove too sweet-toned for some. The Deluxe could be seen as a close cousin to Hagstrom's Les Paul-alike, the Swede, but a more straightforward stance gives it no-nonsense appeal that younger guitarists might like. The F200P factors in some Fender influence, while delivering some typically fat P-90-style sounds. It's an effective combination that could curry favour with players willing to look beyond the obvious.

These models recall the classy, Korean-made creations that appeared bearing the De Armond brand a few years back. Those are now deemed quite desirable and, on the evidence of this threesome, there's no reason to think the Hagstrom range won't soon be regarded in a similar light. 

Hagstrom Viking	
Guitarist RATING	★★★★★
Hagstrom Deluxe	
Guitarist RATING	★★★★★
Hagstrom F200P	
Guitarist RATING	★★★★★