

GODIN 5TH AVENUE KINGPIN & PEERLESS PORT TOWN £567 & £599
ELECTRICS



PHOTOGRAPHY BY PHILIP SOWELS



Godin 5th Avenue Kingpin & Peerless Port Town £567 & £599

Turning the clock back to a time when guitarists didn't worry about going up 'the dusty end' *by David Gallant*

The year 1936 was a groundbreaking one in the history of the modern guitar, with the introduction of the first truly electric 'Spanish' instrument by Gibson: the ES-150. Up until that point, the humble guitar had been pumping out rhythms at the back of a band, struggling to be heard behind the vast power of the brass and woodwind sections. Guitarists naturally felt frustrated by both their instrument's lack of volume and the lack of opportunity to front a band – or at the very least, to take a solo. Various devices had been used to try to amplify the instrument, including basic DeArmond pickups, but these were rudimentary and often ineffective. So when the Gibson 'electro-Spanish' ES-150 hit the streets, players greeted it as a minor miracle and what was once a minor player in the rhythm section, now became capable of finding its true voice as a serious solo instrument.

The ES-150 was originally fitted with a hexagonal 'blade' pickup and a massive magnetic bar attached to the underside of the top of the instrument between the pickup and the

bridge. The Gibson found its fame in the hands of Charlie Christian, acknowledged as the father of the electric jazz guitar. Post-war, the original blade pickup was replaced by the much more powerful and

responsive P-90, which didn't require the large magnet.

Both our test instruments – the Godin 5th Avenue Kingpin and the Peerless Port Town – pay homage to this lineage with a modern take on the cheaper,

The Kingpin looks every bit the period piece with its traditional non-cutaway archtop body and unbound f-holes

laminated body ES-125, which was launched in 1938. Less prone to feedback and popularised by the later skiffle and R&B movements, it went

The rivals

The **Aria FA50E** (£429) is similar to our two test guitars, with its mahogany top and maple back and sides. It has a floating mini-humbucker and pickguard-mounted tone and volume controls. If you prefer to add your own electrics, then try the **Adam Black JA10** (£499) with a spruce top, maple back and sides, adjustable rosewood bridge and rosewood fingerboard. The **Eastwood Messenger** (£850) is a wild card. It's got a full body, two New York mini-humbuckers, a spruce top, mahogany back and sides, and 'wing' f-holes.



On traditional archtops, the top is left as unadulterated as possible



through many stylistic modifications to become one of Gibson's longest-running production lines, with the last instrument rolling out of the factory as late as 1970.

Godin 5th Avenue Kingpin

The Kingpin looks every bit the period piece, with its traditional non-cutaway archtop body and unbound f-holes. Its wild cherry laminate top, back and sides have a very distinctive, highly figured grain pattern, and have been custom finished to look not unlike a traditional French polish. In keeping with the retro look, the heavy single body binding comes in a dark cream, which perfectly complements the Kingpin's tobacco-stained sunburst face.

The super-smooth, shallow, 'C'-profile silver leaf maple neck is joined to the headstock just beyond the Tusq nut, while at the other end it's bolted to the body and carries a heel with a wild cherry bottom plate. The unbound cambered rosewood fingerboard reflects the smoothness of the maple neck and comes with 21 medium/heavy frets and pearloid dot position markers. The black-faced headstock offers an outline that repeats the cream body binding. It carries both the Godin name and the 5th Avenue motif, and individual generic tuners with chrome bean buttons.

At the other end of the instrument is a chrome trapeze tailpiece and a compensated, adjustable Graph Tech bridge made specifically for the Kingpin. The bevelled brown tortoiseshell pickguard is large and set in a comfortable playing

position, however, the more modern material means it lacks that authentic vibe. Electrics are served by a Godin-branded single-coil P-90 and top-mounted Gibson-style 'top hat' tone and volume controls.

Sounds

Unplugged, the Kingpin offers exactly what you might expect from a laminate archtop: the 'chukka-chukka' chords and excellent separation. The harmonics pop out easily all over the fretboard and, while there's an overall tightness to the sound, there's a warmth and depth to the tone and a particularly pleasing smoothness and clarity to the treble register. In the mid-range and bass, things are decidedly more 'honky' while still retaining that round, full tone.

The Kingpin's P-90 lacks power in out-and-out terms, but the upside is that it doesn't overpower the guitar's intrinsic voice. It successfully summons an old-school vibe but it doesn't quite have the cut and bite you'd expect of a P-90 in a solidbody, so chord work can become woolly. However, diads, triads and solo lines can play up to the positive sonic characteristics of the instrument, and it's possible, with a little bit of adjustment, to conjure up a very satisfying, warm jazz vibe.

Peerless Port Town

With its pearloid and abalone position blocks – plus bound fingerboard and f-holes – the Port Town seeks to reflect a 'higher-end' vibe compared to the Kingpin. It comes with a nicely book-matched laminated spruce top and laminated maple back and sides. Like the

The open, edgy tone with just the right amount of body makes the Port Town your passport to blues heaven



The scratchplate of the Port Town mounts the ribbed tone and volume controls



If you're looking for that authentic Charlie Christian vibe, in truth it falls between the two instruments here

Kingpin, the binding is cream, but the Port Town's is tastefully laced with a pair of black carriage lines.

The 'C'-profile maple neck feels very much like a heavily-finished original Gibson. However, unlike the Gibson equivalent model, the Port Town's neck is scarf-jointed to the headstock beneath the second fret. The shallow (ES-125-style) heel is capped with cream binding and the fully-bound rosewood fretboard carries 20 medium/jumbo frets and is topped by a synthetic 'urite' nut. Above that is the black-faced and cream bound Peerless 'Lady Lip' headstock, with abalone and pearloid brand name and motif. It's finished off with some chrome-plated Grover tuners.

The tailpiece here is a chromed 'fan' in Art Deco style with a fully-compensated, height-adjustable rosewood bridge. The cream-bound plastic pickguard, with its double black carriage lines, carries the mini black ribbed tone and volume controls for the floating mini-humbucker, which is secured to the neck by blade arms in the usual way.

Sounds

Played acoustically, the Port Town is a very lively guitar with an edgy, almost brittle sound to it – particularly in the upper register. Although there's plenty of volume and resonance, there's very little depth or width to the sound. Having said that, the harmonics pop out perfectly and both the separation and articulation are excellent.

Plugged in, the mini-humbucker faithfully reproduces much of the acoustic characteristics of the instrument, although again it sounds a little weedy. There's also the question of the tone and volume pots. Along with many other production-line lower-to-mid-priced instruments, the Port Town suffers from poor quality pots with very little discernible change before six o'clock and

a massive boost at 10. That said, when you have got the balance right and you've cranked up the amp, there's that open, edgy tone with just the right amount of body to make this instrument your passport to blues heaven.

Verdict

If you're looking for that authentic Charlie Christian vibe, in truth, it probably falls somewhere between the two instruments here. The Kingpin has an altogether tighter sound with a sweeter and smoother tone, while the Port Town is sonically very open and has a distinct timbral rawness with a particularly thin treble.

Interestingly, while the Kingpin lends itself to being played acoustically, skiffle-style, the Port Town needs the helping hand of amplification to bring it to life, where it cries out for a bottleneck and a dose of the country blues. Putting the Kingpin through an amplifier, however, can turn the instrument into a very cool jazz cat with a smooth, seductive voice and a wealth of rich, mellow tones. **G**

The Bottom Line

Godin 5th Avenue Kingpin

We like: The authentic retro vibe and that warm jazz tone
We dislike: It's sacrilege, but how about a bridge pickup
Guitarist says: Close in spirit and vibe to a Gibson ES-125. And doesn't it just look fantastic?

Peerless Port Town

We like: The unbridled playability of the thing
We dislike: Underpowered pickup and mediocre pots
Guitarist says: With its tonal and timbral characteristics, this is very much a blues box – especially if you decide to upgrade the electronics



Godin 5th Avenue Kingpin

PRICE: £567 (inc gigbag)
ORIGIN: Canada
TYPE: Non-cutaway archtop
TOP: Laminated wild cherry
BACK/SIDES: Laminated wild cherry
MAX RIM DEPTH: 130mm
MAX BODY WIDTH: 407mm
NECK: Silver leaf maple
SCALE LENGTH: 630mm (24.84-inch)
HARDWARE: Chrome-plated die-cast tuners and trapeze tailpiece
NUT/WIDTH: Tusq/43mm
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood with pearloid dots
FRETS: 21, medium/heavy
BRIDGE/SPACING: Graph Tech Adjustable/54mm
ELECTRICS: Single Godin P-90, top-mounted volume and tone
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 2.25/4.9
OPTIONS: The 5th Avenue (£424) has the same specs as the Kingpin, but without a pickup
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISH: Cognac burst (as reviewed), black and natural
Active Music Distribution
0208 693 5678
www.godinguitars.com

Test results

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

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★



Peerless Port Town

PRICE: £599
ORIGIN: Korea
TYPE: Non-cutaway archtop
TOP: Laminated spruce
BACK/SIDES: Laminated maple
MAX RIM DEPTH: 84mm
MAX BODY WIDTH: 410mm
NECK: Maple
SCALE LENGTH: 628mm (24.72-inch)
HARDWARE: Chrome-plated Grover die-cast tuners and HL7J trapeze tailpiece
NUT/WIDTH: Urite/44mm
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood with pearloid/abalone blocks
FRETS: 20, medium/jumbo
BRIDGE SPACING: Adjustable rosewood/53mm
ELECTRICS: Peerless 'renovated' floating mini-humbucker, pickguard mounted volume and tone
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3/6.6
OPTIONS: A deluxe hard case adds £59, a gigbag £29. See website for full Peerless range
LEFT-HANDERS: Available to order, costs an 10 per cent
FINISH: Sunburst high gloss (as reviewed) only
Peerless Guitars Europe
0208 949 1091
www.peerlessguitars.co.uk

Test results

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

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★