

GEAR REVIEW
GRETSCH G5420T



GRETSCH G5420T ELECTROMATIC HOLLOW BODY £709

Gretsch's long-running Electromatic range gets a makeover. Has the best got better? We find out

IT'S been a busy year for Gretsch in 2016. So far we've seen the introduction of the affordable Streamliners and a reorganisation of the Professional Collection; now it's the turn of the Electromatic line. The first wave of the makeover centres on the classic Hollow Body designs: the single-cut 5420, as here, the double-cut 5422 and the double-cut 12-strings. So what's new?

Before we get to the nitty gritty, one change will please any Gretsch fan on a budget, and that's the headstock: not only has it been down-sized to late-50s spec and bound, but the Electromatic logo has also moved to a more discreet

capacitor, like the new Professional Collection models, to retain your high-end as you turn down.

Pretty much everything else is the same, including arrow-thru-G control knobs, knurled screw-on strap buttons and Blacktop Filter'Tron humbuckers. It's a lot more 'Gretsch' than the cheaper, more generic Streamliners (although we do have the same vibrato and secured bridge here) but at nearly twice the price, that's what you'd expect. And speaking of price, these upgraded models are pretty much the same as last year's models: hardly cheap though, especially as we don't get even a gigbag, and for a 16-inch

The Electromatics are the start of the real Gretsch experience

position on the pickguard, so it's not immediately apparent that you're playing a more affordable Gretsch model – always nice.

Secondly, there's a new metallic colour for Gretsch, Fairlane Blue, which takes its name from the Ford Fairlane, introduced in the USA in 1955, the same year that Gretsch introduced the classic 6120 Chet Atkins Hollow body on which our this is based. We haven't played a note and we're already smitten.

Other visual changes for 2016 are the larger 'oversized', bound f-holes and 'aged', cream edge binding with inner black/white/black purfling strips. With the chrome hardware comes classy thumbnail fingerboard inlays (the gold-plated models use hump-block inlays); the nut material changes from Delrin to Graph Tech's NuBone and the master volume gets a 'treble bleed'

wide full-depth jazz-box like this, you're gonna need protection.

A bulky ol' bird the 5420 may be, but it's no slouch as a player. The neck here, compared to recent Streamliners and Pro Collection models we've played, follows the same U profile but is very slightly thinner. Frets are chunkier than those on the Streamliners, and nicely fettled, and as supplied the action, with 0.010s, is pretty slinky. The wooden-foot Adjusto-Matic bridge – Gretsch's terminology for a tune-o-matic copy – is secured so it won't get knocked out of place and intonation is spot on. The bridge itself leans forward and back as you move the Bigsby and tuning return-to-pitch, once you've stretched your strings, is good.

If the Streamliner humbuckers were more vanilla, these Blacktop Filter'Trons capture plenty of the classic twang that Gretsches are

AT A GLANCE

BODY: Laminated maple
NECK: Maple, glued-in
SCALE: 625mm (24.6")
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood
FRETS: 22
PICKUPS: 2x Blacktop Filter'Tron humbuckers
CONTROLS: 3-position pickup selector toggle switch, master volume, master tone, 2x individual pickup volume controls
HARDWARE: Gold-plated Adjusto-Matic bridge, licensed Bigsby B60 vibrato, open-back tuners
LEFT-HANDED: Yes, black or orange stain only, without Bigsby (£749)
FINISH: Fairlane Blue (as reviewed) Orange Stain & Aspen Green
CONTACT: Fender GB
 01342 331700
www.gretschguitars.com

DOWN SIZED

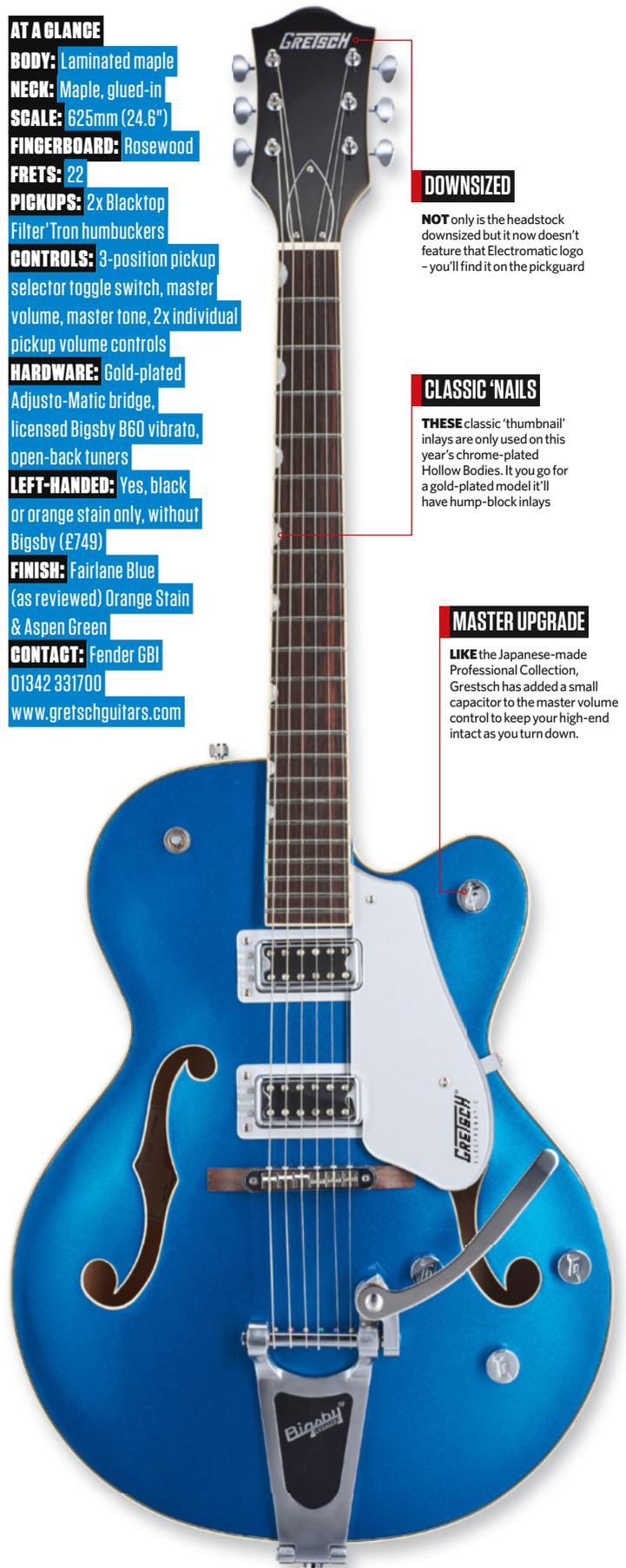
NOT only is the headstock downsized but it now doesn't feature that Electromatic logo – you'll find it on the pickguard

CLASSIC 'NAILS'

THESE classic 'thumbnail' inlays are only used on this year's chrome-plated Hollow Bodies. If you go for a gold-plated model it'll have hump-block inlays

MASTER UPGRADE

LIKE the Japanese-made Professional Collection, Gretsch has added a small capacitor to the master volume control to keep your high-end intact as you turn down.





Rancid Tone

It's all about the pickups. Where do those Black Top Filter'Trons come from?

Rancid's Tim Armstrong knows his Gretsch tones, and it's thanks to him we have the Black Top 'buckers that have been standard issue on Electromatics since 2011. The original 'black top' Filter'Trons appeared on Gretsch models in the 70s, a pretty turbulent time for many brands, Gretsch included, in terms of quality. But they found a "good one", remarks Gretsch's Adam Bowden-Smith, in the form of Tim's Country Club from this era. In creating Tim's first 2010 signature model, Gretsch reverse-engineered the pickup, put it in a standard Filter'Tron-like casing with visible pole pieces - the originals had a black top and no visible poles - and created a new pickup with "bit more midrange: punchy but still with clarity." It's quite a different pickup to the the Streamliners' Broad'Tron - a standard humbucking-sized pickup, that has a "wider and fatter sound," compared to a Filter'Tron, says Adam - hence the name.

known for: plug into a clean Fender-style amp, add lashings of reverb and/or some slapback and you drop right back to the birth of rock 'n' roll. Add a little crunch and its instant rootsy rock that's full of character and makes a great foil for a thicker sounding Gibson. It is, aside from its dual top braces and a small square block directly under the bridge that connects the top to the back, fully hollow so do you need to be careful as you turn up the wick. But get it right and you can lean into your amp and have

No Electromatic logo here - they'll be none the wiser!



Chrome hardware also means you get classic thumbnail inlays

beautiful musical feedback that's easily manipulated by the Bigsby.

The new master volume circuit really helps, and the individual volumes now become subtle, just slightly muting the highs as you turn them down. Our sample needed a little pickup height adjustment to balance the neck and bridge and ensure mixed tones have sparkle and depth.

Way more Gretsch than the Streamliners, although not as stage-friendly as those Player's Edition Pro guitars, the

Electromatics sit nicely in the middle and are the start of the *real* Gretsch experience, in sound at least. It's not cheap, but when you bring a classic pretty much bang up to date, it's hard to put down.

Dave Burrluck

SUMMARY	FEATURES			
	SOUND QUALITY			
	VALUE FOR MONEY			
	BUILD QUALITY			
	PLAYABILITY			
OVERALL RATING	★★★★★			



The metallic Fairlane Blue is a brand new colour for Gretsch

ALSO TRY...

GRETSCH
STREAMLINER G2420T
£395

If you can't stretch to the Electromatic model, the Streamliner version has more generic parts but is still very much a Gretsch



VINTAGE VSA8500R
£749

Available in classic orange or white (£799) this, ahem, copy exudes Gretsch-style while the full humbucker-sized pickups make replacement easy



GUILD STARFIRE II ST
£699

Based on the original Starfire model, this new version is a thinline with pointed cutaway and great sounding Guild 'Anti-Hum' LB-1 humbuckers

