



Words Jonathan Horsley / Photography Neil Godwin

SINGLE-PICKUP GUITAR ROUND-UP

Here are four super-smart electrics that prove you can get a frightening array of tones from one hard-working bridge pickup



You don't need this review to persuade you that a single-pickup electric can produce some of the most divine tones ever committed to tape. Just dig into the record bag and pull out some Mountain, whose Leslie West wrung so much tone out of his Gibson Les Paul Junior it ought to have been seized from him and West tried for witchcraft.

We're not saying that you'll nail West's tone here – though the Gordon Smith GS-160 is spec'd to do so and the Godin Summit Classic plays a similar field – but you might find a guitar

that has the tone you've been looking for, and that nothing else comes close. Shredders looking for a guitar as classically American as a glass bottle of Coke might never find anything to usurp the EVH 5150; with that hellacious finish and period-appropriate spec, it's surely irresistible to Eddie Van Halen's disciples, even at that price. And those practising the dark arts, demanding the harshest metal tones and supreme playability, might well discover that the LTD EC-BKM Black Metal is their Excalibur. All four are different, but each one is testament to the idea that a neck pickup simply isn't for everyone.



GORDON SMITH GS-1 60

£699

This Gordon's alive!

I've seen this available cheaper online. What's the deal?

Gordon Smith spec a number of stock instruments for retail while offering a build-to-order service online. An 2018 entry-level stock GS-1 retails for £629, but has a poplar instead of a mahogany body. Spec options are many but include body material and thickness, single or double-cut (Standard), fingerboard material (add AAA flamed maple for £100).

It looks old-school.

Yup, and with a solid mahogany body, a single P-90 pickup, not to



mention the shorter 625mm scale that was used by Gibson in the 1950s, it's an instrument whose design takes much of its inspiration from the Les Paul Junior.

What is the benefit of the brass nut?

Oh, you don't see them so much these days but the brass makes it super-durable, and helps lend the GS-1 a bright and resonant tone that will make big, open chords ring out. The downsides? Well, the brass is heavy, and it adds a little weight to the headstock, and the tone can be a little unforgiving, accentuating the treble – and your mistakes!



AT A GLANCE

KEY FEATURES: Mahogany body, mahogany neck (set), 625mm (24.6") scale, 22 frets, brass nut, rosewood fingerboard, 1x P-90 pickup (bridge), 1x volume, 1x tone, chrome Wrap-over bar bridge, spec options available online, includes gigbag

FINISH: Vintage White [as reviewed]

CONTACT: Gordon Smith gordonsmithguitars.com

GODIN SUMMIT CLASSIC SG P90

£679

Bringing home the basswood

This looks like it's going for the Les Paul Junior vibe, too?

It sure does. The Vintage Burst is similar to those of some classic Juniors – there's the single-cut, the P-90, too. But the Summit Classic SG has a contemporary feel. Its neck has a satin-smooth finish, and a basswood body is preferred over mahogany.

That bridge sounds pretty impressive.

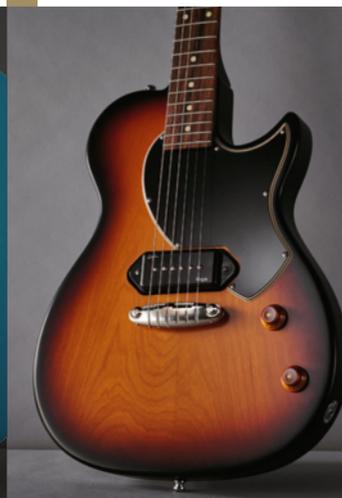
It sure is. The beauty of this guitar lies in the simplicity of its construction. Sure, no doubt a lot of metallurgical voodoo went on in the GraphTech R&D department to come by their ResoMax alloy



("Designed to maximise harmonic content and richness in every note," says GraphTech) but its design happily makes string changes a cinch and offers a neat and comfortable station for your picking hand.

What can you tell us about the Kingpin P-90?

Besides the fact that it's got a lot of attitude, chewy hot mids and brightness, clarity and is hugely responsive in that volatile territory between mid and treble? Well, the fact that Godin also deploy it in their 1950s-inspired archtop series, 5th Avenue, shows that they're happy with its vintage bona-fides.



AT A GLANCE

KEY FEATURES: Laurentian basswood, maple neck (set), 628mm (24.75") scale, 22 frets, rosewood fingerboard, 1x Godin Kingpin P90 pickup (bridge), 1x volume control 1x tone, GraphTech nut, GraphTech ResoMax Sonic 1 one-piece wrap-around bridge, includes gigbag

FINISH: Vintage Burst [as reviewed]

CONTACT: 440 Distribution godinguitars.com

EVH STRIPED SERIES 5150

£1,269

The stunt double

There's a lot of EVH guitars - what makes this one special?

The 5150 is based on Eddie Van Halen's custom 1984 Kramer, which is one of the most iconic hot-rodded S-style electrics ever. Here, those graphics are applied to a basswood body, with a quarter-sawn maple neck bolted onto the body. The hockey stick headstock, the Floyd Rose locking vibrato set to divebomb, the D-Tuna... this is the holy grail for Van Halen fans.

What the Hellmann's is the EVH D-Tuna?

We're glad you asked! The EVH D-Tuna is a little engineering gizmo



that replaces the locking screw on the sixth string's saddle, allowing you to switch to drop-D tuning on the fly. Just pull it out. Return to standard tuning by pushing it back in. Trust us, it's a pretty ingenious addition.

Do you have to love Van Halen to want this?

We understand that it might be hard to get by the graphics, but the tone and feel is guaranteed to please any shredder. That said, the 5150 is pretty pricey and alternatives, such as the Jackson Pro Series Soloist, might speak louder to those who feel Eddie's style may cramp their own.



AT A GLANCE

KEY FEATURES: Basswood body, maple neck (bolted on), 304mm-406mm (12"-16") compound radius fingerboard, 647mm (25.5") scale, 22 jumbo frets, 1x EVH Wolfgang Alnico II humbucker (bridge), 1x volume, EVH-Branded Floyd Rose locking vibrato w/ EVH D-Tuna

FINISH: Red, Black and White Stripes [as reviewed]

CONTACT: Fender EMEA
evhgear.com

ESP LTD EC-BKM BLACK METAL

£679

Sworn to the dark

Isn't this a little too minimal?

That's exactly the point. This is a high-powered electric that saves all the pyrotechnics for its tone. Let's face it, you've got to admire the message discipline in its design. The LTD logo is three-dimensional, embossed as though it were a badge on a car; of course, there's no tone knob; even the Seymour Duncan logo is blacked out; and judging by this guitar, the evil have no use for fretmarkers. Glow-in-the-dark sidemarkers will help you find yourself on the ebony fretboard - and believe us, there's plenty of dark to glow in.



Is the Seymour Duncan pickup active?

No, the Blackened Black Winter is passive, but it is a fierce, high-output humbucker that will have no trouble eating up the gain you dial into your tone. It is vacuum wax potted to kill any squeal and has a similar output to the Seymour Duncan Invader.

Is this just for metal?

While we'd absolutely concede that the clean tones are surprisingly engaging, and rolling back the volume knob offers a little more range, this was definitely built for high-gain scenarios. It's just too morbid for jazz.



AT A GLANCE

KEY FEATURES: Mahogany body, mahogany neck (set), 628mm (24.75") scale, 22 extra jumbo frets, macassa ebony fingerboard, 1x Seymour Duncan Blackened Black Winter humbucker (bridge), 1x volume control, locking LTD tuners, TonePros locking tune-o-matic bridge and tailpiece

FINISH: Black Satin [as reviewed]

CONTACT: Sound Service
espguitars.com



HEAD TO HEAD

Which guitar picks up the golden globe?

Let's start with the EVH 5150, a guitar of such luminous shred appeal it could be seen from space. Its EVH-branded Floyd Rose locking vibrato will divebomb only, as per Eddie's setup, but it helped execute a minor tuning miracle as the 5150 came out of the box in tune. Locking vibratos are a faff to down-tune so slipping this in and out of drop-D with the D-Tuna comes in handy. Wound for classic rock and 80s metal tone, the 5150's Wolfgang Alnico II humbucker is an absolute belter, delivering livewire crunch that's harmonically resonant and begging to be partnered with an MXR phaser and a Hawaiian shirt.

For gain saturation, please refer to the LTD Black Metal. Its mahogany neck and body construction brings out a warmth that belies its being marketed as an Arctic misanthrope. We love the playability on both. Sure, the 5150's clunky heel obstructs access up past the 15-fret but that never slowed Eddie down. The Black

THE EVH 5150 IS BEGGING TO BE PARTNERED WITH AN MXR PHASER

Metal, meanwhile, has a contemporary feel, a neck that has just enough fat on it to be comfortable. We could say similar about the Godin; the satin neck, its profile none too clubby, feels of a piece with a modern instrument. Built in Canada from Laurentian basswood, which comes in a little heavier than the basswood used on the 5150, the Summit Classic is well balanced, with plenty of treble shimmer, perfect for blues squeals or biting rock licks. Rolling the tone back smooths off that sharpness, making it a viable option for jazz. The Gordon Smith GS-1 performs a similar trick. There is a lot of play in that tone control and players looking for that nasal bass response of their bridge pickup won't miss it. The GS-1's natural voice is bright and punchy. Through a Vox AC30 it could cut through brick. But there's an authority and liveliness to the GS-1's midrange. Leslie West would surely dig it. We certainly do.



EVH 5150: prepare for its positively unchained 'livewire crunch'



Gordon Bennett! The Gordon Smith taking its inspiration from the Les Paul Junior

FINAL VERDICT

Which single-pickup guitar is the right one for you?

With the EVH 5150 and LTD Black Metal designed for a very particular player, this feels like a shoot-out between the Godin's tastefully appointed and quite beautiful Summit Classic and Gordon Smith's tastefully appointed and quietly awesome GS-1 60. The latter will definitely take the Les Paul Junior fans. That you can spec your own online is a big plus, but this review model was a lovely piece of

mahogany, and while that P-90/brass nut combo will expose any sloppy playing it also facilitates some truly soulful tone in the sweet spot between its mids and highs. The Godin is more forgiving, more fun. It can similarly do scratchy blues, bright classic rock tones, and maybe even has more of an identity than the GS-1, a little more vintage chic.

Those looking to play the *Atomic Punk* have got to go with the 5150 but it's a lot of Van Halen and for a lot of money. It really is a

guitar with an identity; for casual fans or those just looking for a high-spec S-style to go bananas on, there are better options out there. For super fans? Well, you've already placed a deposit.

And so to the nuclear option, the LTD Black Metal. Ostensibly an Eclipse model with the colour taken out of it and a custom Seymour Duncan to supply the fire, it's impeccably built, plays great, sounds fearsome, and if you're playing extreme metal, this'll do brutal.

**GORDON SMITH
GS-1 60**



**GODIN SUMMIT
CLASSIC SG P90**



**EVH STRIPED
SERIES 5150**



**ESP LTD EC-BKM
BLACK METAL**



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

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	OVERALL RATING	★	★	★	★	★