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# SMALL BODY SEMI-HOLLOWS

These four semi-hollow guitars could change your perceptions, offering comfortable bodyshapes and tones from all eras





**W**hen we talk about the semi-hollow electric guitar, often our first thoughts turn to the Gibson ES-335 and its ilk; guitars with wide bodies that you could use as life rafts in cases of extreme emergency. Are they awesome? Absolutely. But sometimes it feels like they are for players built like Mr Tickle. Not all semi-hollow electrics need be that cumbersome. Which brings us here. There's a Gretsch Electromatic G5655TG Center Block Jr not dissimilar to George Harrison's favourite, the Duo

Jet. If the Gretsch works a '50s mojo, the Hagström Alvar turns the clock back to 1965, looking much like a downsized version of the Swedish company's first semi-hollow, the Viking. While the Fender Vintera '70s Telecaster Thinline takes its name very seriously with a spec that is pure 1972, right down to the bullet-style truss rod. These are vintage-voiced guitars, but rounding out the round-up we've got the LTD PS-1000, an opulent singlecut with two high-powered Seymour Duncan P-90-style pickups and a contemporary feel. Proof that not only can Semis scale down, that they are as much about the future of guitar design as they are its past.







## GRETSCH ELECTROMATIC G5655TG CENTER BLOCK JR

£859

### Hot finish, hotter pickups

**What's the difference between the Center Block and the Center Block Jr?**

It's all in the size. The Center Block Jr shaves a few inches off at its extremes, measuring a svelte 10.5-inches across at the upper bout, 13.5-inches across the lower bout and a 8.625-inch waist. Looking at the lower bout, that's just under half-an-inch wider than a Les Paul, and the G5655TG feels much like the Duo Jet.

**What about the G5655TG's build?**

It has a laminated maple body and a chambered spruce centre block



that is crucial, with the extra spruce buttressing the body from the lower strap button to the neck helping to stop the squealing feedback that can blight fully hollow electrics when played with high volume and gain.

**But this isn't a gain machine, surely...**

Yes and no. This has loads of '50s rock 'n' roll tone, and can confidently deliver juiced-up country blues, but the Broad'Tron humbuckers are not your Granddaddy's Filter'Trons. These run a darn sight hotter, voiced nicely for hard rock with a broad frequency response.



### AT A GLANCE

**KEY FEATURES:** Maple body with chambered spruce centre block, maple neck (set), 24.6" scale, 22 medium jumbo frets, laurel fretboard w/pearloid thumbnail inlay, 2x Gretsch Broad'Tron humbuckers, 1x master volume, 2x volume 1x tone, three-way pickup selector, Bigsby B70 vibrato tailpiece, Graph Tech NuBone nut, gold hardware

**FINISH:** Orange Stain (as reviewed), Cadillac Green, Azure Metallic

**CONTACT:** GretschGuitars.com

## ESP LTD DELUXE X-TONE PS-1000FM

£1199

### Dial X for extreme

**This looks like a squished Eclipse...**

It does, the sort of melted singlecut bodyshape of the PS-1000 is a refreshing change and it is clear that ESP has put a lot of thought into making this a semi-hollow for today's player. Turn it around and you'll see a neatly sculpted heel for upper fret noodling – exactly what this guitar was designed for with its extra-jumbo frets and shreddable thin-U neck.

**Is it a skinny neck?**

Not skinny. In fact, there's a little substance to this one, making it



hugely comfortable for assembling a flurry of powerchords, while the flat 13.78-inch fretboard radius will accommodate fast lead playing.

**Are those humbuckers?**

No, humbucker-sized P-90-style single coils. They are Seymour Duncan Phat Cats and wound super-hot, with the metal enclosures to try keep the microphonic hum and hiss to a minimum. They are really hot and punchy, with midrange that could blacken your eye at high volume. But that said, they are versatile. Just tweak your volume and tone knobs to get the best out of them.



### AT A GLANCE

**KEY FEATURES:** Mahogany body, maple neck (set-through), 24.75" scale, 22 extra jumbo frets, ebony fretboard w/pearloid abalone block inlay, 2x Seymour Duncan Phat Cat single coils, 2x volume controls, 2x tone, three-way pickup selector, locking LTD tuners, Tonepros Locking tune-o-matic bridge and tailpiece, chrome hardware

**FINISH:** Violet Shadow (as reviewed), Purple Sparkle

**CONTACT:** ESPGuitars.com

## HAGSTRÖM ALVAR

£775

### Classic looks, supreme playability

#### Is that the Hogwarts crest on the tailpiece?

No, but it is almost like Hagström has made playing this guitar a black tie event. “Elegance defined” is how they see it, and that tailpiece certainly classes up the instrument. Even if you are of a mind that believes these aesthetic fripperies are a bit much, the Viking trapeze stringholder-cum-tailpiece is classic Hagström and practical, making string changes a breeze.

#### Has this got the usual Hagström accoutrements?

If by that you mean the Resinator fretboard and H-Expander truss



road system, then yes, and these help keep Hagström so consistent. Hagström swear by their trademark Resinator composite material as being more tonally consistent than the more commonly used fretboard woods. There are no complaints here, expect perhaps the observation that a fine piece of rosewood never hurt anyone.

#### Who is this guitar for?

That is hard to say. The Alvar can do it all. Those Hagström HJ-50 Alnico-5 humbuckers have a vintage voice that cleans up nicely for jazz, is perfect for blues, and has plenty of cream on tap for overdriven rock.

## FENDER VINTERA '70S TELECASTER THINLINE

£999

### Make everyday Tele Tuesday

#### What's this Vintera series about?

Fender has recognised that guitarists obsess over vintage gear but very few can afford it, so the Mexican-built Vintera series takes a browse through catalogues of yore and brings some of these designs back into play, priced for your average player, so you can pick up a Thinline Tele at a quarter of the price you might pay for a '72 model.

#### Is this just like the vintage models?

In many respects yes. Aesthetically it has the CBS-era Fender 'F' logo stamped on the tuners and three-bolt neck plate, while the



7.25-inch fretboard radius, thin frets, and ever-so-slightly clubby soft C-profile give it an old-school feel. The high gloss finish on the neck and fretboard is a nice touch, too.

#### How does it sound?

A little more open than a regular solid-bodied Tele but with lots of that sharp twang and growl you would expect from the ultimate workhorse electric. The Wide Range humbuckers have been reworked here to sound more 1972 and they have certainly got plenty of the classic Telecaster clarity and punch to make this a versatile semi.



#### AT A GLANCE

**KEY FEATURES:** Maple-ply body, maple neck (set), 24.75" scale, 22 medium jumbo frets, Resinator fretboard w/ pearloid block inlay, 2x HJ-50 humbuckers, 2x volume, 2x tone, three-way pickup selector, 18:1 tuners, tune-o-matic with trapeze tail piece, Graph Tech Black Tusq XL nut

**FINISH:** Black Gloss [as reviewed], Wild Cherry Transparent, Swedish Frost

**CONTACT:** HagstromGuitars.com



#### AT A GLANCE

**KEY FEATURES:** Swamp ash body, maple neck (bolt-on), 25.5" scale, 21 vintage-style frets, maple fretboard, 2x Wide Range humbuckers, 1x volume control, 1x tone, three-way pickup selector, vintage-style tuners, vintage-style Strat strings-through-body hardtail bridge

**FINISH:** Vintage Blonde [as reviewed], Aged Natural, Candy Apple Red

**CONTACT:** Fender.com





# HEAD TO HEAD

The battle for small semi supremacy commences

**T**hese four compact semi-hollow guitars have lot of virtues in common. They're all resonant, comfortable, playable – the Hagström is especially playable – and when it comes to tone, they each put their own spin on what a semi-hollow could sound like. The G5655TG surprised us. Those Broad"Tron humbuckers lay down a formidable challenge to the prevailing wisdom that Gretsch is just for rockabilly, with enough high-gain muscle to shoulder sparkly crisp, hard rock crunch. At high volumes, it really comes alive. There is still some feedback, a little noise, but you wouldn't want a Gretsch to sound housetrained. Roll the gain off and there is a little more definition in there, heaps of bouncy rock 'n' roll tone that pairs well with valve-driven spring reverb and that Bigsby wobble. The LTD PS-1000 is hotter still. Its build and Seymour Duncan Phat Cat P-90 style pickups make it a viable option for metal. Metal? Absolutely. You'll have no trouble

## THESE FOUR COMPACT SEMI-HOLLOWS GUITARS HAVE A LOT OF VIRTUES IN COMMON

cutting through the mix with this, and you can tease all kinds of harmonics out of the PS-1000 when the gain goes past two o'clock. Nonetheless, players will be glad to know that those pickups clean up nicely for some wonderful, upfront cleans. The Hagström's tone sounds more classic semi-hollow, with a little bit of an ES-335 vibe there. The Alvar's humbuckers have a do-everything quality, from jazz and blues through rock, maybe even metal. Meanwhile, there were no surprises with the Vintera Telecaster Thinline, except maybe that it so comprehensively follows through on Fender's promise to deliver a vintage experience for today's player. With that neck profile, the high-gloss finish, and the rounded 7.25-inch fingerboard radius and thin frets, it really feels of a different era. Of course, it is a Telecaster; it can do pretty much anything, but steel yourself for an articulate sound that complements a rounded low end and upfront mids and highs.



A Bigsby-loaded Gretsch may be a familiar sight, but this model has surprising muscle



Fender's 1970s Wide Range 'buckers were designed by Seth Lover, who invented Gibson's original humbucker

# FINAL VERDICT

## Semi-charmed kind of guitars

It is hard to look past the Gretsch with its stunning Orange Stain finish and gold hardware, the Bigsby vibrato, and little details like the thumbnail fret inlay and smaller, bound headstock. It is a beautiful guitar. The purists might throw a fit at the hotter pickups but that's what purists do, and besides, the G5655TG has got plenty of the brand's rock 'n' roll soul in its voice, and that neck profile and feel will delight modern players who might find vintage neck profiles altogether too rounded. Perhaps,

then, the purist might plump for the Telecaster Thinline, a guitar with impeccable retro stylings. The Thinline is so 1972 it probably has memories of Bobby Fischer becoming World Chess Champion. The semi-hollow swamp ash body is warm and resonant. There is that Tele brightness in abundance, albeit supported by a well-rounded low-end that handles overdriven and clean tones with aplomb. It might take a little getting used to for those weaned on skinny necks and jumbo frets but the neck is

in no way intimidating, with a fingerboard that really makes fretting chords a dream. Perhaps the Hagström Alvar and LTD PS-1000 are more flattering to your leads, with the Alvar further evidence that the Swedish company make the most playable guitars in this price range – and maybe the most versatile too – and the PS-1000 proof positive that you can shred on a semi-hollow, and indeed with a P-90-style pickup. Its pugnacious tone will reward experienced, confident players.

### GRETSCH ELECTROMATIC G5655TG CENTER BLOCK JR



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

### ESP LTD DELUXE X-TONE PS-1000FM



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

### HAGSTRÖM ALVAR



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

### FENDER VINTERA '70S TELECASTER THINLINE



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