

The spalted maple top gives this guitar a unique finish

The licensed Floyd Rose keeps the tuning rock solid

No fret markers: you better know your way around

£349

SPEAR GLADIUS SP

SPEAR'S NEW GUITAR IS NAMED AFTER A SWORD. LET'S GIVE THIS SIX-STRINGED WEAPON A STAB...

WORDS: ED MITCHELL

THE SIZZLE

Spear guitars are relatively new to the UK. The company's new Gladius SP model is named after an ancient Roman sword. Spears, swords... presumably that makes this guitar a weapon of rock or something? Looking at it, we wouldn't argue with that. This guitar means business with its aggressive shape, chunky as fuck hardware and pickups, and a top that looks like it was hewn from an old castle door. Yeah, the blokes in Manowar would probably love this guitar. Let's find out if we love it too...

WHAT'S IT GOT?

The beautiful looking top on this guitar is made from spalted maple. 'Great,' you say. 'What the hell does spalted mean?' It's basically regular maple wood that's been scarred by a fungal infection. Being riddled with fungus is never attractive in humans, but as you can see the cosmetic effect it has on the appearance of wood is pretty damn sexy. The fungus is responsible for all those dark squiggly lines on our Gladius SP above. Thanks to the unpredictable nature of our tiny fungal friends every piece of spalted maple is totally different. That means that each Gladius SP is unique. Not bad for a 350 quid guitar, huh?

The construction of the Gladius SP is sophisticated for a guitar of this price. The body and neck are formed from a sandwich of Canadian hard rock maple and mahogany. At the business end of this sandwich Spear has glued a pair of mahogany wings – with that slice of spalted maple stuck on top – to form the twin-cutaway body shape. The effect of all this creative woodworking is a neck-thru guitar that looks much more expensive than

it really is. The only thing that lets the guitar down is some rough finish spots on the back of the guitar's neck. Bit more sandpapering next time chaps...

The hardware on the Gladius includes a licensed Floyd Rose vibrato, locking top nut and decent quality geared machineheads all coated in a smoky chrome finish. A couple of Spear H-Monster ALNICO humbuckers (sporting the chunkiest pole pieces we've

"Spear's Gladius SP is a twin-humbucker rock machine with a twist of individuality"

seen in many a jam session) provide the fire power. The pickups share master volume and tone controls and a five-way switch that offers each pickup alone, both on together, and a couple of split coil options.

BUILT TO LAST?

The Gladius SP's sandwiched Canadian hard rock maple and mahogany construction make it feel indestructible. Everything about this guitar screams, 'I'm a chunky fucker so don't mess!' As always, don't drop it, sit on it, set it on fire or anything daft like that, and this guitar will become a rocking family heirloom.

HANDS ON

On a strap the Gladius SP feels substantial but not overly heavy. Tuning is rock solid thanks to that locking vibrato and the slim neck feels fast and comfortable. The fingerboard has no markers although there are dots on the side of the neck – you'll soon get used to finding your way around we reckon. All well and good, but we came to rock, so let's get plugged in...

We were struck by the beefiness of the Gladius SP when we ran it through a small

Marshall amplifier. On a clean channel the pickups were bright and the in-between settings produce warm tones reminiscent of Jimi Hendrix's sound on *Little Wing*. Whack on the overdrive and you'll be grinning from ear to ear. The bridge humbucker is a slaving beast! Harmonics jumped so easily from the strings that we could have given Zakk Wylde a run for his money. The neck humbucker is a little muddy sounding but still useable – it would take a lot to drag us away from that bridge humbucker anyway.

THE BOTTOM LINE

We always play a game of 'guess the price' whenever a new guitar turns up at the TG office. Yeah, the days just fly by. We like to think that we know our stuff, but it's not always easy to nail the price, as we discovered when we whipped out the Gladius SP. Our guesses ranged from £400-odd to 'at least £600. Now that we know the truth we reckon the price tag of £349 makes this guitar a bit of a bargain. Why is it so cheap, you ask? Spear builds its guitars in Vietnam so you get a guitar with great spec at a fraction of the cost of an axe that's born in the USA, Japan or even Korea.

Spear might not have the history or prestige of a company like Jackson or Ibanez, but its Gladius SP deserves a place on your must-try list if you're looking for a twin-humbucker rock machine with great playability and a twist of individuality. Spear still has a lot to prove, but it's made its, ahem, point with the Gladius SP.

FOR: Great looks, chunky tone, cheap as chips
AGAINST: Finish is a bit rough in places

WHO'S IT FOR?

Rockers, shredders and other hairy folk...

INFORMATION

ORIGIN: Vietnam
BODY: Mahogany with 'spalted' maple top
NECK: 5-ply Canadian hard rock maple/mahogany, thru-neck
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood
FRETS: 24, fat
PICKUPS: 2x Spear H-Monster ALNICO humbuckers
HARDWARE: Licensed Floyd Rose Double Locking vibrato and die-cast machineheads
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISH: Natural only
CONTACT: Blacki Distribution 01236 861261
WEB: www.blacki.eu

ALTERNATIVELY

Dean Razorback DB – £495
Jackson DXMG Dinky – £429
Spear T200 – £279

TG RATING:





Flip the page to find out which one won our Group Test head-to-head

Fender J5 Triple Tele Deluxe

Spear Tomcat Golden Tiger

Dean Razorback DB

Washburn W1200 PRO-E

Group Test

Mid-priced rockers around £500

Is Fender's new John 5 Triple Deluxe Tele the best mid-priced rocker on the market right now? Meet three other axes that beg to differ...

WORDS ED MITCHELL

Have you seen what 500 quid can buy you in a guitar shop or online these days? The world is your oyster – especially if you've got a few hundred clams in your pocket.

When we got our hands on the new Fender J5 'John 5' Triple Tele Deluxe recently we took the opportunity to see what the competition had to offer. OK, Mr 5's guitar retails at £699, but as usual a bit of squirrelling around on the internet uncovered some good deals. We actually found a Triple Tele Deluxe selling at £569. You might find an even better deal by the time you read this Group Test.

The quality of top of the range guitars hasn't changed all that much over the years. You should get what you pay for so you have a right to expect the best when you're paying top dollar for a guitar. The real growth in quality has happened in beginner and mid-priced guitars.

The sheer number of brands has created a competitive atmosphere where manufacturers are producing better quality guitars with pro-quality hardware and pickups in an effort to get you to part with your money. These days it's not unusual to find a £400 Chinese-made guitar that kicks ass as hard as an axe priced at a grand. That's great news if you're on a tight budget but can't bear to compromise on tone and playability.

Meet the contenders

For this Group Test we pitted the Fender J5 Triple Tele Deluxe against three guitars that we reckon represent the best value for money for around £500. First, there's the

Dean Razorback DB, which is an affordable version of... you guessed it, Dimebag Darrell's mega-selling Razorback model. We've also bagged Washburn's recently launched W1200 PRO-E, basically an Idol model packing a pair of active EMG humbuckers. Rounding out this collection of six-stringed gladiators is the brilliantly-named Tomcat Golden Tiger from new boys on the block Spear Guitars.

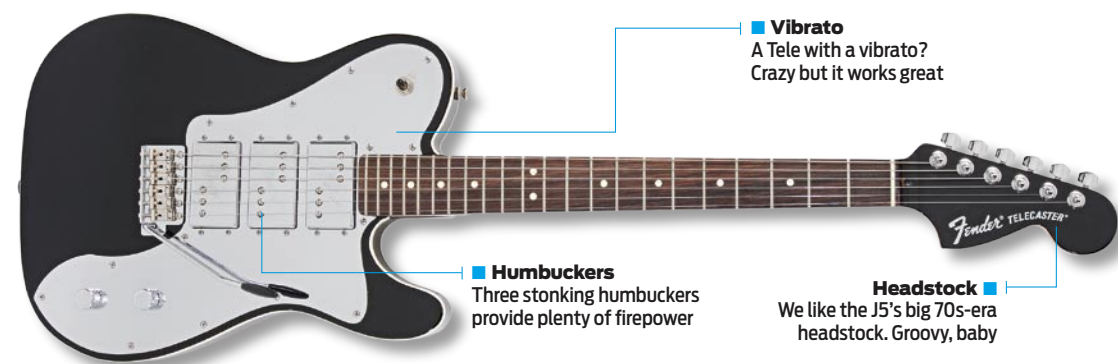
This is a battle between four very different guitars. The only things these axes have in common are wood, humbuckers and a desire to be number one on your shopping list. Which one will bag TG's Group Test prize? Let's get it on and find out...

"IT'S NOT UNUSUAL TO FIND A £400 CHINESE-MADE GUITAR THAT KICKS ASS AS HARD AS AN AXE THAT'S A GRAND"

Fender J5 Triple Tele

£699

John 5's latest blingcaster



Vibrato
A Tele with a vibrato? Crazy but it works great

Humbuckers
Three stonking humbuckers provide plenty of firepower

Headstock
We like the J5's big 70s-era headstock. Groovy, baby

At a glance

Fender J5 Triple Tele Deluxe

BODY: Alder
NECK: Maple, bolt-on
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood
SCALE: 25.5"
PICKUPS: 3x Enforcer 'Wide Range' humbuckers
CONTROLS: Master volume, master tone and three-way pickup selector switch
HARDWARE: Chrome vibrato, Schaller locking machineheads
FINISH: Black only
CONTACT: Fender GBI 01342 331700
WEB: www.fender.co.uk

The Telecaster is almost 60 years old. When you're that age 'the yoof' will just think you're an old fool while the Tele is still cutting it with the kids thanks to cutting-edge signature models from the likes of Jim Root of Slipknot and John 5. Speaking of which...

The sizzle: The J5 Triple Tele Deluxe is based on a 70s Telecaster Deluxe, a Tele/Strat hybrid that some cruel folk nicknamed the 'Uglycaster'. But



Johnny 5's axe looks pretty tasty thanks to a load of pimped-out chrome and sexy black paint.

We say: This guitar is almost brilliant. We love the comfortable 60s-style C-shape neck profile,

the three powerful Enforcer humbuckers, the 22 fat frets and the rock-solid tuning stability provided by the locking machineheads. And a padded gigbag is included in the price.

All gravy but there are a couple of potential deal breakers. For a start, the J5 is a real heavyweight. Everyone in the TG office that picked the guitar up exclaimed, 'Jeez, that's bloody heavy!' We wouldn't fancy strapping this guitar on for a whole gig. We also kept whacking our pick off that

middle humbucker, a common problem with triple 'bucker guitars. It's not a serious downer, just annoying.

If these niggles haven't put you off the J5 Tele make sure you shop around: we've seen this guitar online for as little as £569. Great guitar but not quite a five out of five, er, Mr 5...

SUMMARY

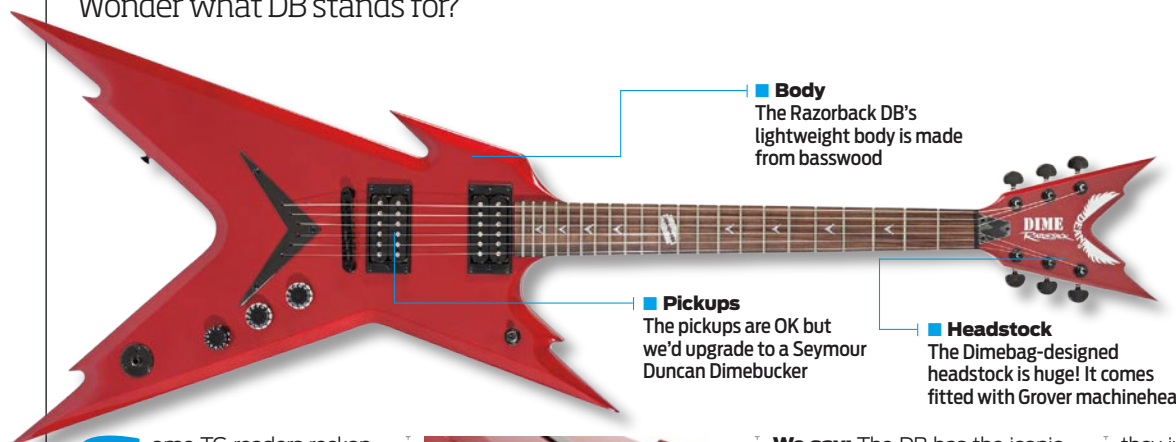
For: Killer looks, superb neck
Against: Heavy! Obtrusive 'bucker
★★★★☆

TG says: A heavyweight contender!

Dean Razorback DB

£495

Wonder what DB stands for?



Body
The Razorback DB's lightweight body is made from basswood

Pickups
The pickups are OK but we'd upgrade to a Seymour Duncan Dimebucker

Headstock
The Dimebag-designed headstock is huge! It comes fitted with Grover machineheads

At a glance

Dean Razorback DB

BODY: Basswood
NECK: Maple, bolt-on
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood
SCALE: 24.75"
PICKUPS: 2x Dean humbuckers
CONTROLS: 2x volume, master tone and three-way pickup selector switch
HARDWARE: Grover machineheads, tune-o-matic bridge
FINISH: Metallic red (shown), metallic white and classic black
CONTACT: Bill Lewington
WEB: www.deanguitars.com

Some TG readers reckon we should stop going on about Dimebag Darrell because he's dead an' that. Sorry, ain't gonna happen. Dime designed the Dean Razorback, one of the most brilliant metal guitars of all time, so get over it!

The sizzle: We wish we could afford a US-made Razorback, but we're talking two grand plus. Even the Chinese made Razorback with its set-neck,



Floyd Rose vibrato and Seymour Duncan Dimebucker humbucker will rid you of £995. Hmm, what we need is a Razorback that looks the part but only costs 500 quid. Funny we should say that...

We say: The DB has the iconic spiky body and huge Dimebag-designed headstock. It's only when you look closer that you see why this guitar is so keenly priced: instead of the mahogany body you get basswood; the neck is a bolt-on; you get a fixed bridge in place of the Floyd Rose locking vibrato; and there's no Seymour Duncan Dimebucker in the bridge position.

In use, it's Dime's signature pickup we miss most. The DB's humbuckers are poky enough but

they just don't have the balls we expect from one of Dime's metal machines. Here's an idea: we've spotted the Razorback DB online at £314. Get a Seymour Duncan Dimebucker (approx £80), have it fitted and you'll have a killer metal guitar that plays great at a bargain price.

SUMMARY

For: Lethal looks, the neck profile
Against: We miss the Dime pickup
★★★★☆

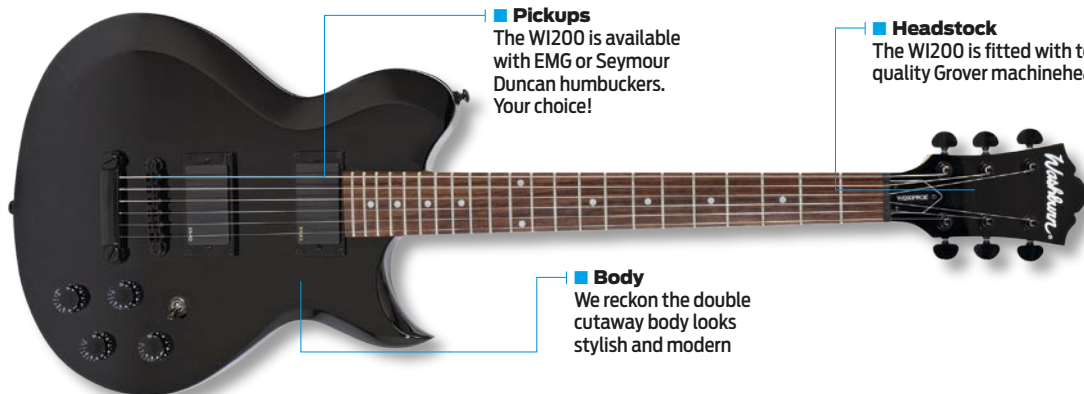
TG says: A modern metal icon

"THE TOMCAT GOLDEN TIGER OFFERS MORE PLAYABILITY THAN YOU'D EXPECT FOR £429"

Washburn W1200 PRO-E

£499

Is it the Rock Idol?



Pickups
The W1200 is available with EMG or Seymour Duncan humbuckers. Your choice!

Headstock
The W1200 is fitted with top quality Grover machineheads

Body
We reckon the double cutaway body looks stylish and modern

According to Washburn, its 200 PRO Series was 'designed around the single premise to create a truly professional series of guitars offering the best value for money in today's electric guitar market'. Hey, we'll be the judge of that, Washburn dudes.

The sizzle: The 200 PRO Series Idol model is available fitted with Seymour Duncan '59 and Custom Custom humbuckers (neck and bridge respectively) at £379 or EMG85 (neck)



and EMG81 (bridge) active humbuckers at £449. The one we've got has the EMG pickups.

We say: The Idol's double-cutaway thin body and twin humbucker line-up give it the

feel of a modern take on a Gibson SG. There are a load of Idol models available including the aged W164 Vintage guitar (£449), but our W1200 is designed to offer the maximum firepower for the least amount of money. That's why it features a bolt-on neck and Agathis body, instead of the set neck and mahogany body of some of the other Idol models.

It's main selling point is the EMG pickups. EMGs cost £90 each, so the £449 retail price of the W1200 PRO-E starts to look

like a steal. Well, we've been digging and found this guitar selling online at £359, so it's got to be the cheapest EMG-equipped guitar out there. Call us greedy but a set neck would've sweetened the deal. Still, we can't complain. The W1200 PRO-E didn't win this Group Test, but it came pretty damn close.

SUMMARY

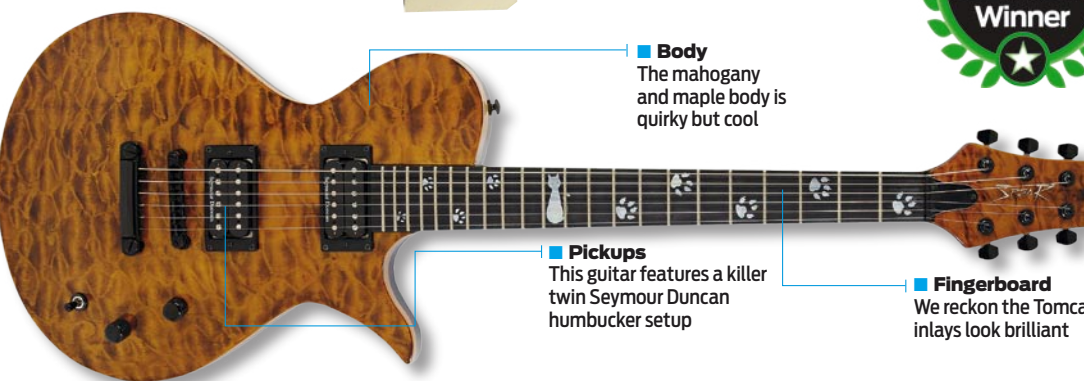
For: Looks cool, great pickups
Against: We'd prefer a set neck
★★★★☆

TG says: A 21st Century SG...

Spear Tomcat Golden Tiger

Pants or the cat's pyjamas?

£429



Body
The mahogany and maple body is quirky but cool

Pickups
This guitar features a killer twin Seymour Duncan humbucker setup

Fingerboard
We reckon the Tomcat's inlays look brilliant

Spear is a relative newcomer to the guitar scene in the UK, and it deals in high-spec, quality guitars that sell at affordable prices. We were impressed when we reviewed Spear's Gladius SP recently, so let's see how the new Tomcat Golden Tiger stacks up.

The sizzle: The Tomcat Golden Tiger looks like the bastard child of a Gibson Les Paul and a Fernandes Ravelle. Specification is high with a mahogany body,



maple top and a striking flame maple veneer. You also get a pair of Seymour Duncan humbuckers. So we know it's got all the right bits, but is this tiger a roaring success? Sorry...

We say: Yep, this is a killer guitar. The chunky neck and 22 fat, well-finished frets make the Golden Tiger feel like a guitar at twice the price. String bending above the 12th fret is a joy and tuning stability is rock solid.

We can't fault the pickup selection either; there's a rocking Seymour Duncan Jeff Beck at the bridge and a Jazz in the neck position. We even like the slightly bonkers pussy footing fingerboard inlays including the cat-shaped inlay at the 12th fret,

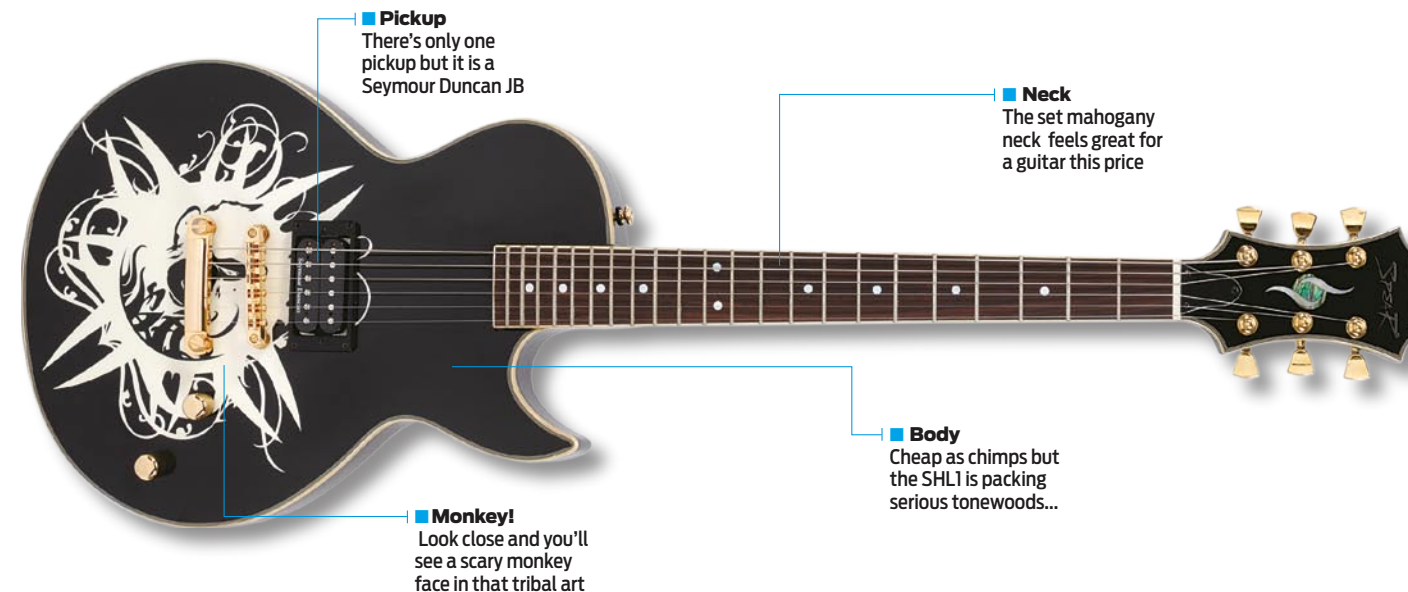
although we would agree that they're an acquired taste.

The Tomcat Golden Tiger won this Group Test because it offers more playability and features than we'd ever expect for £429. This tiger took on some fearsome competition and emerged as the pick of the litter.

SUMMARY

For: Value for money, killer spec
Against: Feline inlays not for you?
★★★★☆

TG says: Top cat!



■ **Pickup**
There's only one pickup but it is a Seymour Duncan JB

■ **Neck**
The set mahogany neck feels great for a guitar this price

■ **Body**
Cheap as chimps but the SHL1 is packing serious tonewoods...

■ **Monkey!**
Look close and you'll see a scary monkey face in that tribal art

Spear SHL1 'Evil Monkey' £299

Don't worry, it's not Britney's signature model. TG spansks the monkey...

Contrary to popular opinion, it's not hard to impress TG. All you need to do is design an electric guitar that combines adventurous materials, thrusting features, a flash of innovation and a *souçon* of whimsy, and execute it with panache, delivering it to our door with a silk bow around the neck for under £300. Spear seems to have managed all that with the Evil Monkey except for the bow. And we can live without that.

The sizzle: Spear was launched in 2005 by a splinter group of ex-Cort employees. They weren't available, but Mark Breingan at UK distributor Black i Distribution was happy to spread the hyperbole. "It's a tough market," he notes, "but we're trying to bring over guitars that appeal to the rock market and are a bit different. The Evil Monkey looks like a standard singlecut, but it's

got the tribal monkey design, and it's been cut back to just one Seymour Duncan JB humbucker, because a lot of rock players just sit on the bridge pickup anyway. Is it good for solos? Oh yes."

We say: TG's all for innovation, but sometimes it's equally cool to see a budget model that sticks with tradition. This primate ain't breaking any moulds, but if you're turned on by the classic 50s singlecuts, you'll be stunned how close you get for £299.

Its weight is staggering, and the build materials are textbook Les Paul: a dense mahogany body topped with maple, a set mahogany neck that fits your hand like a baseball bat, and an instantly familiar scale that eats up expressive, vibrato-heavy playing styles. All that for £299? Spear must be having a laugh.

But not everyone's smiling. Single-pickup electrics are always contentious, and if you mainly

play rhythm at the neck, it might be worth stretching to Spear's Tom Cat Golden Tiger model at £429. Still, the Seymour Duncan JB humbucker at the bridge is an absolute belter, handing you the ultimate solo tone on a silver platter, supplying a glorious bite that complements the endless sustain of the mahogany, and even supplying decent warmth for chords if you experiment with the amp EQ.

You'll find cheaper singlecuts on the market, and you'll find better ones. The point is, we can't remember playing one that is *both* cheap as hell *and* rocks this hard. Consider us impressed.

Henry Yates

At a glance

Spear SHL1 Evil Monkey

BODY: Solid mahogany body and top
NECK: Mahogany, set, three-ply
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood, with dot inlays
SCALE: 24.75"
PICKUPS: 1x Seymour Duncan JB humbucker in bridge position
CONTROLS: Master volume, master tone
HARDWARE: Gold
FINISH: Black with Tribal graphic [pictured]
CONTACT: Black i Distribution 01236 861261
WEB: www.blackie.u

SUMMARY

For: Serious quality in every department for £299

Against: Derivative styling, lack of neck pickup might anger some

★★★★★

TG says... This Spear is mint, baby!

The Evil Monkey has a set neck with a rosewood fingerboard



"THIS PRIMATE AIN'T BREAKING ANY MOULDS, BUT IF YOU'RE TURNED ON BY THE CLASSIC 50S SINGLECUTS YOU'LL BE STUNNED HOW CLOSE YOU GET FOR £299"



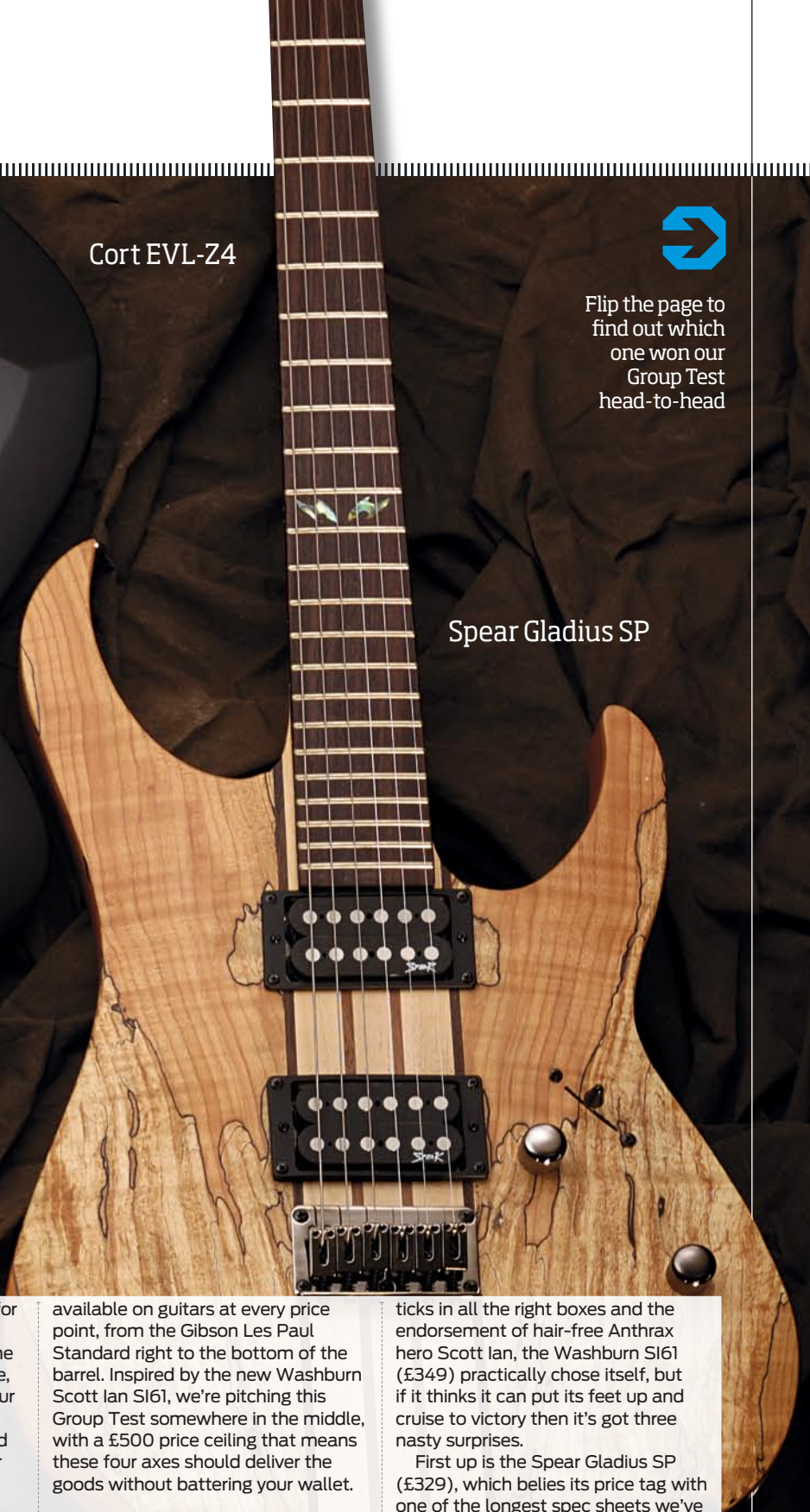
Washburn SI61



Hamer XT SATQ



Cort EVL-Z4



Spear Gladius SP



Flip the page to find out which one won our Group Test head-to-head

Group Test

Humbucker axes under £500

You don't need to cough up for a Gibson Les Paul to experience the creamy thrills of humbuckers. With £500 in our wallet and our Marshall stack rolling behind us, TG sets out to prove it...

WORDS HENRY YATES

There's a time and a place for humbuckers. Specifically, it's when you're stood in the spotlight, cloaked in dry ice, legs apart, a rabid crowd baying your name as you tear into the riff from *Sweet Child O' Mine*. Singlecoils and P90s have their specialities, but for hard rock the humbucker is king.

Strange, then, that when Gibson technician Seth Lover invented the PAF humbucker in 1957, he wasn't thinking about any of that. In fact, Lover's brief was simply to design a pickup that eliminated the irritating hum of singlecoils, which he achieved by incorporating two magnetic coils with opposing windings and polarities (so 'bucking' the 'hum'). It was a happy side effect that the PAF was fatter and angrier than its rivals – qualities that the guitarists of the time were desperate to nail.

Half a century later, humbuckers built to Lover's guiding principles are

available on guitars at every price point, from the Gibson Les Paul Standard right to the bottom of the barrel. Inspired by the new Washburn Scott Ian SI61, we're pitching this Group Test somewhere in the middle, with a £500 price ceiling that means these four axes should deliver the goods without battering your wallet.

Humbucker heroes

Like we said, you can't move for humbucker-equipped guitars in the mid-price market, so TG could afford to be as fussy as a Stringfellows doorman and turn away any model that wasn't built by a reputable luthier, offered a mediocre spec or turned up in ripped jeans. With

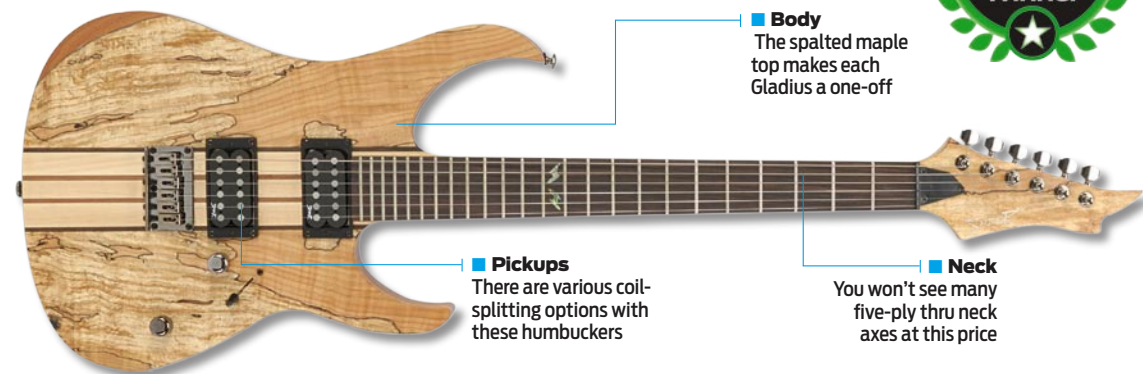
ticks in all the right boxes and the endorsement of hair-free Anthrax hero Scott Ian, the Washburn SI61 (£349) practically chose itself, but if it thinks it can put its feet up and cruise to victory then it's got three nasty surprises.

First up is the Spear Gladius SP (£329), which belies its price tag with one of the longest spec sheets we've seen from a Vietnamese luthier. Next up, we've thrown the Satanists a bone with the Cort EVL-Z4 (£329), which we're hoping should sound as frightening as it looks. Finally, we've thrown a few more fivers into the mix to see what the Hamer XT SATQ can deliver in this Group Test for £499. Let battle commence...

"YOU CAN'T MOVE FOR GUITARS WITH HUMBUCKERS IN THE MID-PRICE MARKET SO TG COULD AFFORD TO BE FUSSY"

Spear Gladius SP £329

Is this Spear mint?



Body
The spalted maple top makes each Gladius a one-off

Pickups
There are various coil-splitting options with these humbuckers

Neck
You won't see many five-ply thru neck axes at this price

At a glance

Spear Gladius SP

BODY: Mahogany, with spalt maple top
NECK: Five-ply Canadian hard maple and mahogany, thru construction
FINGERBOARD: Indian rosewood
SCALE: 25.5"
PICKUPS: Spear M-PAF Monster Pole humbuckers
CONTROLS: 1x volume, 1x tone, 5-way pickup selector
HARDWARE: Die-cast tuners, string-thru tailpiece
FINISH: Natural Open Pore
CONTACT: Black i Distribution 01236 861261
WEB: www.blacki.eu

TG's spent recent months raving about Spear Guitar to anyone who'll listen, so when we heard the boys had launched a hard-tail Gladius SP, we crawled over broken glass with our flies undone to get one.

The sizzle: Established in 2005, Spear might not be a household name, but you're not Posh Spice so stop worrying about labels and feel the spec. Not so much a guitar as a tree with strings, the Gladius combines a solid



mahogany body with spalted maple top, throws in a five-ply maple and mahogany thru neck and stretches our grins even further with twin Monster Pole humbuckers whose coils can be split with a five-way selector.

We say: Anyone with eyes should already be hot for the Gladius SP, whose credible tonewoods and natural beauty convey the vibe of a high-end boutique instrument. But it's not until you retract your tongue that you realise this model has also been honed to perfection, with the expansive cutaways and speedy unfinished neck making it handle like a go-faster 24-fret Fender Stratocaster.

Handling is one thing and tone another, but here the Gladius scores again. As you'd imagine

from the eclectic timbers and thru-neck, there's huge sustain and tonal character on the table, and these benefits are complemented by the class of the PAFs. The option to split the coils is clever, but left TG them in one piece to deliver a tone that is fat, thick... and enough to bag Spear the Group Test title.

SUMMARY

For: One-of-a-kind looks, tone

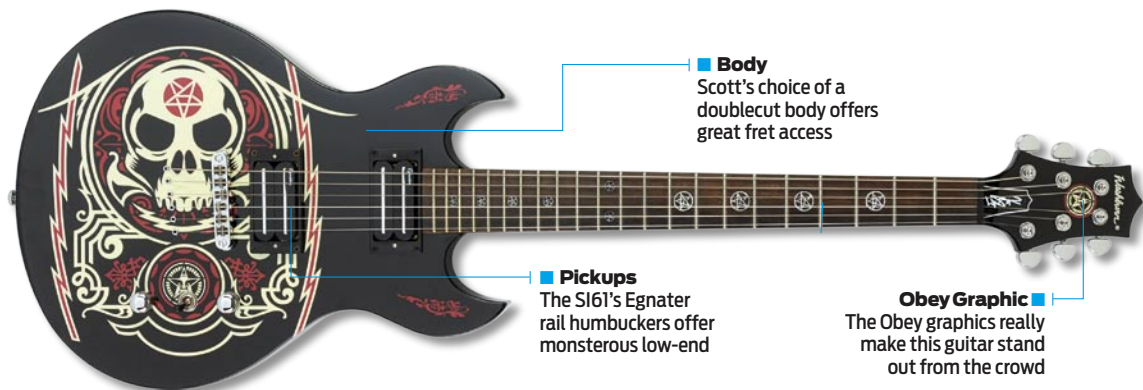
Against: We're keeping quiet

★★★★★

TG says: It'll give you wood

Washburn SI61 £349

Great Scott?



Body
Scott's choice of a doublecut body offers great fret access

Pickups
The SI61's Egnater rail humbuckers offer monstrous low-end

Obey Graphic
The Obey graphics really make this guitar stand out from the crowd

At a glance

Washburn SI61

BODY: Solid mahogany
NECK: Mahogany, bolt-on
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood, with Anthragram inlays
SCALE: 25.5"
PICKUPS: 2x Egnater humbuckers
CONTROLS: 1x volume, 1x tone, 3-way pickup selector
HARDWARE: Grover 18:1 tuners, tune-o-matic bridge, string-thru tailpiece
FINISH: Obey Graphic [pictured]
CONTACT: Sound Technology 01462 480000
WEB: www.washburn.com

Scott Ian can't get enough of his US Custom Shop SI81: "This guitar is exactly what I've been looking for – it's evil and it plays fuckin' awesome." Let's hope the cheaper SI61 rocks too...

The sizzle: Washburn treats mid-price punters well, so while realists won't be surprised to find the SI81's graded timbers and premium hardware missing in action, they'll be satisfied with the features the SI61 retains.



Visually, there's actually more of Ian's influence here, with an Obey graphic and Anthragram fret inlays giving off a meaner vibe than the US model's po-faced maple top and parallelograms.

We say: Look past the Obey graphic and you'll realise the SI61 follows familiar contours, costing it points in the originality stakes, but clawing them back if you love the classic doublecut vibe. It's easy to hit the top frets and to fret notes with speed and precision, which will suit Anthrax fans looking to mimic Ian's percussive down-picking. We'd concur with the man himself – it plays frickin' awesome.

Following a rail format, the SI61's twin Egnater humbuckers

stand out in this group, offering a bone-crunching bottom-end that's perfect for *Among The Living* speed-riffing, but that's less convincing for more melodic styles. Still, if you're considering this axe it's because you want to nail Ian's vibe, and if that's the criteria, mission accomplished.

SUMMARY

For: Perfect for Ian-style riffing

Against: Not for non-Anthrax fans

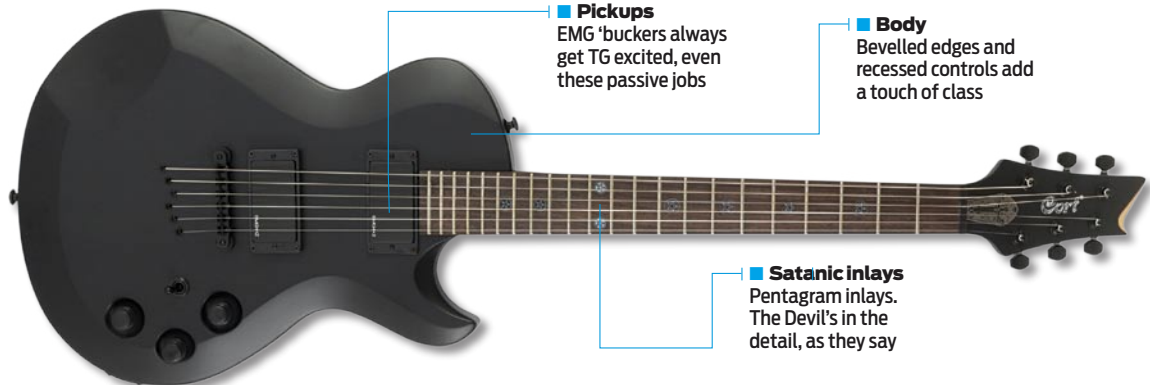
★★★★★

TG says: Scott of the anarchic

"THE NATURAL BEAUTY OF THE GLADIUS SP CONVEYS THE VIBE OF A BOUTIQUE INSTRUMENT"

Cort EVL-Z4 £329

Something EVL this way comes...



Pickups
EMG 'buckers always get TG excited, even these passive jobs

Body
Bevelled edges and recessed controls add a touch of class

Satanic inlays
Pentagram inlays. The Devil's in the detail, as they say

For all you aspirant rockers on a budget, it's only a matter of time before the sales assistants suggest a Cort. And if you're wearing Mortiiis makeup, a crucifix and biker boots, they'll probably show you this one.

The sizzle: Don't be fooled by novelty trimmings like the coffin truss rod cover and pentagon inlays – Cort's EVL-Z4 is backed up by one of the most serious specs in the group. A solid mahogany body and a bolted



maple neck are always good to see, but the main event is undoubtedly the twin EMGs. It's time to wake the dead...

We say: The body shape is clichéd fare, but Cort's judicious

use of contours and bevels for your beer belly and picking arm mean the Z4 model is the most accommodating of the four axes in this Group Test. As a playing experience, it feels tight and compact, offering a comparable pocket-rocket vibe to a Les Paul Junior but with zipper play due to the C-profile of the neck. It's a shame the fret access isn't quite on the par of the doublecuts it's up against though.

For £329, it goes without saying that these are passive EMGs, but that didn't matter

– we still dug out a superb response across the board, with the bridge turning in monster tone for solos and the neck taking care of crunching overdriven rhythm parts. There are no silver medals in the TG Group Test, but if there were we'd be hanging it round the EVL-Z4's neck.

SUMMARY

For: Spooky metal vibe, EMG kudos

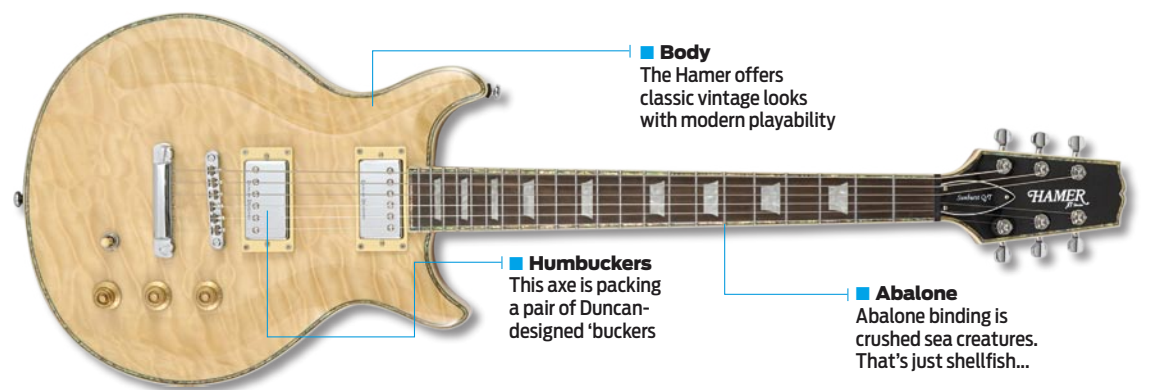
Against: Fret access could be better

★★★★★

TG says: It's a scream!

Hamer XT SATQ £499

Hamer of the Gods...



Body
The Hamer offers classic vintage looks with modern playability

Humbuckers
This axe is packing a pair of Duncan-designed 'buckers

Abalone
Abalone binding is crushed sea creatures. That's just shellfish...

Don't get all shirty about the price. Instead, take a look at the headstock, remind yourself that this is a Hamer and count your lucky stars you're able to get within sniffing distance of this legendary brand.

The sizzle: Hamer reckons the SATQ could cause you a headache, albeit a nice one. "You'll have trouble deciding if you prefer the great looks or incredible sound!" spouts the



website. True, this instrument is a triumph of form and function, combining eye candy like the quilted top and abalone inlays with serious artillery like the twin Duncan humbuckers.

We say: In contrast to the moshier styling of the SI61 and Z4, the SATQ drips class. The build is luxurious and impeccably tidy, from the bound fingerboard to the natural maple cap, while the physical performance evokes a lost collector's item, letting you slide through a volley of vibrato-heavy blues licks like it's the most natural thing in the world. It's always good to see Duncan humbuckers, and in the SATQ's case it's even better to hear them. Buttery at the neck

and purposeful at the bridge, these units should delight older players who are still fuming that they couldn't afford a Les Paul, but they might not be mental enough for younger and harder players to make the financial stretch. You know who you are, so act accordingly.

SUMMARY

For: All-round class and kudos

Against: It doesn't like Slipknot riffs

★★★★★

TG says: You get what you pay for