

Semi-Hollow & Hollowbody Rumble!

TESTED BY THE GP STAFF

THAT THE ACOUSTIC AND ELECTRIC WORLDS TRULY CONVERGE IN A SEMI-HOLLOW OR hollowbody guitar is one big “duh.” Traditional jazzers are pretty much required to play one, of course, and, in the hands of archtop magicians such as Brian Setzer, these babies can spew big-band chords, mysterious single-note lines, rootsy Americana riffs, and hyper-distorted turbo-charged rock all in the same sentence. They're diverse little doggies, and they typically make you work a bit to unleash the beast within. But when you first stand in front of a roaring amp, and feel a hollowbody resonating into your guts and chest—reacting almost physically to your every pluck and finger movement—it's a pretty darn sensual experience. So consider that the seven boxes going head-to-head in this month's Fight Club can trigger a plethora of pleasure centers.

I plugged the four models I reviewed into a Mesa/Boogie Stiletto head and Old Dog X-Cab, a Marshall JVM 210H head and Marshall 4x12, an Egnater Rebel-20 and Rebel-112X cab, a Vox AC15, and a Traynor Custom Special 50. Barry Cleveland tested the Gretsch Electromatic 5122 through a Rivera Venus 6 and a Fender Deluxe Reverb, while Reggie Singh used a Crate 120 2x12 for his assessment of the Reverend Club King RT. Art Thompson's evaluation of the PRS SE Custom Semi-Hollow Soapbar involved a Victoria Golden Melody and a Dr. Z MAZ “Junior NR.” Matt Blackett helped with the Hutchins Memphis evaluation, plugging it into the Victoria Golden Melody at the GP offices.

These seven new hollows and semis provide a marvelous opportunity to evaluate a broad offering of models in a specific niche. But as these instruments exhibit different sizes and price points, fairness dictates that we can't do an apples-to-apples Fight Club and name an overall winner. So we decided to have some fun, and label each model's attributes with the name of a famous actor. As you'll see, the labeling makes a certain amount of giddy sense, and it should help point you to the model that best enhances your technique and musical endeavors. —*Michael Molenda*







The Johnny Depp Collings I-35 Deluxe

THERE'S NO MISTAKING YOU'RE LOOKING AT A luxury item when you scan the I-35's stunning quilted-maple top finished in a high-gloss root beer hue—not to mention the beautifully retro ivoroid control knobs, the gold hardware, the ivoroid binding, and the mother-of-pearl Collings logo. The basic retail price for the I-35 is \$5,800, but these additions launched the review model's price tag to \$6,575: premium quilt top (\$200), parallelogram inlays (\$150), gold hardware (\$125), black/white purfing (\$100), hardshell case (\$200). For many working guitarists, the I-35 will be relegated to the land of dreams. But what a dream it is.

The U.S.A.-made I-35 is a magnificent example of guitar making. To find any construction or finish flaws, I think you'd need an atomic microscope, because the naked eye will see nothing but perfection from heel to headstock. I even did former *GP* editor Andy Ellis' trick of sneaking a small mirror through the f-holes to expose any rough innards, but everything appeared to be as neat and clean as a surgeon's instrument tray. The quality control is so off-the-map that lugging the I-35 to a club gig struck me as little different than toting a Rembrandt to a kindergarten fingerpainting class. And yet, if this beauty can't be a beast on stage, then, as far as I'm concerned, it's more of an investment than an instrument.

From a playability standpoint, the I-35 continues to be achingly seductive. Its wide, vintage-style neck and superbly dressed frets are so inviting that your technique improves about 20 percent simply by placing your fingers on the fretboard. It's a magical experience. I thought the ivoroid knobs might be slippery, but the material grips your pinky tightly, and

the pots turn with exceptional smoothness. The pickup-selector switch is positioned for easy, on-the-fly manipulation—although wild strummers might hit it by accident.

While I was a bit embarrassed subjecting the I-35 to punk rock, it was more than game to rage. There's a hint of sophistication in every tone—a smooth sheen to the highs, midrange frequencies akin to polished steel, and tight lows—but when I cranked the gain, the I-35 responded with all the snot and grit you'd expect from more obviously rock-oriented axes. However, you also get the versatility to dial in stout and resonant jazz timbres, open-sounding acoustic-like tones, and clean and funky pops and snaps. I tagged the I-35 as “Johnny Depp” because he's a striking movie star who can carry Hollywood blockbusters, and still be believable in dark indie films. The I-35 can do it all, as well, but, like a box-office champ, it'll cost you big time for the privilege of its partnership. —*Michael Molenda*

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Collings, (512) 288-7776; collingsguitars.com

MODEL	I-35 Deluxe
PRICE	\$6,575 retail, as tested/ Street price N/A
NUT WIDTH	1 11/16"
NECK	Mahogany, set
FRETBOARD	24 7/8"-scale Brazilian or Madagascar rosewood
FRETS	22 medium-wide
BODY	Honduran mahogany with fully carved, solid flamed-maple top
PICKUPS	Jason Lollar custom humbuckers
CONTROLS	Two Volume, two Tone, 3-way pickup selector
BRIDGE	TonePros
TUNERS	Sperzel
FACTORY STRINGS	D'Addario EXL115
WEIGHT	6.7 lbs
KUDOS	Dazzling looks. Fabulous playability. Stunning tones.
CONCERNS	Only that 90 percent of us can't afford it.

The James Franco Gretsch Electromatic 5122

TESTED BY BARRY CLEVELAND

FEW GUITARS SAY “AMERICA” AS CLEARLY AS A Gretsch. The company is one of the most venerable stateside manufacturers, and Gretsch models such as the 6120 and 6136 are so closely associated with country, rockabilly, early rock and roll, and other staples of Americana that it is hard to imagine what those styles would sound like without them. Nonetheless, the company has had great success with its line of less-expensive, Korean-made instruments, and, after playing the 5122, it’s easy to see why.

The 5122’s dark walnut stain and urethane finish allows its pretty maple grain to show through, as does the transparent, raised pickguard. The guitar is generally well constructed with cleanly executed joints all around—although a couple of knobs came loose, and had to be reattached with an Allen wrench—and the binding that graces the top, back, and fretboard was precisely cut and installed. The

medium-jumbo frets were similarly well cut and placed, with no sharp edges or other irregularities, and the smooth rosewood fretboard, the medium-thin neck, and excellent setup make the guitar very easy and enjoyable to play. The 5122’s ornate “vintage style” tuners and “Bigsby Licensed” vibrato don’t necessarily inspire confidence at first glance, but both function surprisingly well, and the guitar stayed in tune even after undergoing extensive Duane Eddy-grade bar yanking.

The weakest aspect of the 5122 is the bridge pickup. You play a Gretsch largely for its characteristic twang, and, in this case, the Gretsch humbucker failed to wrangle the jangle. The Tone control also left something to be desired, as it does practically nothing in the first half of its range, and then quickly chokes off the highs during the remainder. The neck humbucker, on the other hand, sounded comparatively full and well balanced, possessing pleasing warmth while retaining midrange and treble clarity.

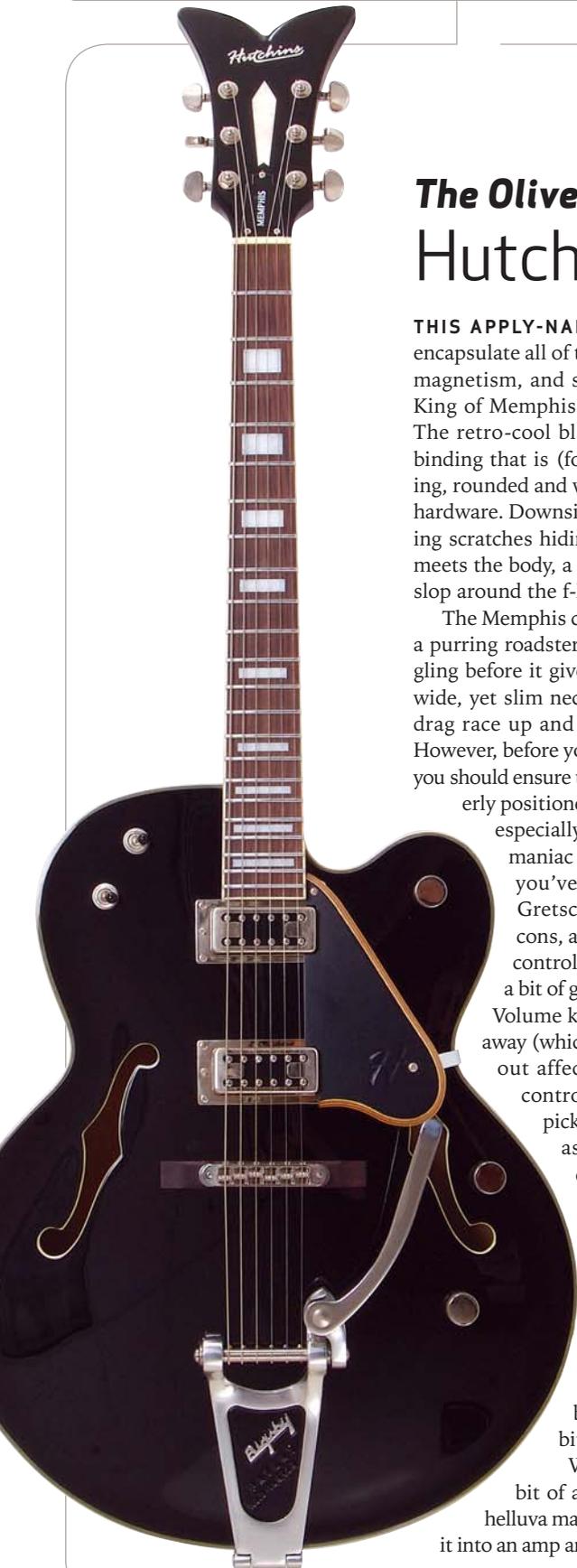
One can’t reasonably expect an instrument at this price point to deliver all of the stylistic and tonal mojo of an American-made model three times as much, but the Electromatic 5122 gets you into the ballpark. It receives the “James Franco” tag, because, like the up-and-coming young actor, the 5122 provides much of the élan of an icon—in this case, James Dean—but perhaps without the mystery, vibe, and depth that made the original a legend. —Barry Cleveland



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Gretsch, (480) 596-9690, gretschguitars.com

MODEL	Electromatic 5122
PRICE	\$1,000 retail/\$700 street
NUT WIDTH	1.68"
NECK	Maple, set
FRETBOARD	24.6"-scale rosewood
FRETS	22 medium
BODY	Laminated maple
PICKUPS	Gretsch Dual-Coil humbuckers
CONTROLS	Bridge Volume, Neck Volume, Master Volume, Tone, 3-way pickup selector
BRIDGE	Adjusto-Matic with Bigsby B60 vibrato tailpiece
TUNERS	Gretsch vintage-style
FACTORY STRINGS	D'Addario, .011-.049
WEIGHT	6.8 lbs
KUDOS	High-quality workmanship. Plays well. Good intonation.
CONCERNS	Bridge pickup lacks characteristic Gretsch jangle. Limited Tone control.



The Oliver Reed Hutchins Memphis

THIS APPLY-NAMED BIG BOX SEEMS TO encapsulate all of the smoldering cool, outlaw magnetism, and self-absorbed quirks of the King of Memphis himself, Mr. Elvis Presley. The retro-cool black beauty boasts an aged binding that is (for the most part) outstanding, rounded and well-dressed frets, and solid hardware. Downsides are minor—slight binding scratches hiding under the neck where it meets the body, a sharp nut, and a little paint slop around the f-holes.

The Memphis can be as rough and sweet as a purring roadster, but it takes a bit of wrangling before it gives up its rebel charms. The wide, yet slim neck profile lets you cruise or drag race up and down the frets with ease. However, before you start your fingers a-flyin', you should ensure the unsecured bridge is properly positioned for accurate intonation—especially if, like me, you're a bit of a maniac on the Bigsby. Also, unless you've been flight checked on Gretsch Tennesseans, White Falcons, and Country Gentlemen, the controls on the Memphis may take a bit of getting used to. You get three Volume knobs—a Master on the cut-away (which reduces overall level without affecting tone), and dedicated controls for the bridge and neck pickups (which darken the tone as the knobs are turned down). Then, there are two 3-position switches. The switch closest to the bridge is a conventional pickup selector, and the one nearest the nut is a tone control (the up position delivers full treble response, down rolls off treble, and middle is a subtle bit o' both choice).

While the Memphis can be a bit of a petulant beast, it makes a helluva marvelous noise when you plug it into an amp and release its pent-up energy.

Midrange frequencies are the guitar's forte, and they're much edgier than the classic Duane Eddy twang. Clean, single-note lines sound more like Roky Erickson (think "Reverberation") than Ennio Morricone, and when you crank the amp gain, you'll be spewing an even raunchier yowl than Billy Duffy's White-Falcon-driven riffs with the Cult. Nothing short of a berserk Mafioso with a missile launcher is going to keep the Memphis from brawling to the front of a band mix. Resonant lows are available via the neck pickup, but I only went there for breakdowns and feedback howls, because the bridge tones provided all the sounds I needed. The rockin' Memphis gets the "Oliver Reed" rating, because, like the boozy British actor, it will cause you a spot of trouble, but once you get it on stage, it will deliver a brilliantly macho and intense performance. —*Michael Molenda*

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Hutchins Guitars, dist. by C&J Distributing, (901) 383-6575; hutchinsguitarsusa.com

MODEL	Memphis
PRICE	\$1,399 retail/\$999 street
NUT WIDTH	1 ¹¹ / ₁₆ "
NECK	Maple, set
FRETBOARD	24 ³ / ₄ "-scale rosewood
FRETS	22 medium
BODY	Maple
PICKUPS	Two Entwhistle Retro single-coils
CONTROLS	Three Volume, 3-way pickup selector, 3-way tone selector
BRIDGE	Tune-O-matic-style with Bigsby B6 tremolo
TUNERS	Grover Imperial
FACTORY STRINGS	D'Addario, .011 set
WEIGHT	8.4 lbs
KUDOS	Big, brawling midrange tones.
CONCERNS	Some cosmetic issues. Sound palette slightly monochromatic.

The Orson Welles Normandy ATG-CH

PERHAPS THE MOST STRIKING GUITAR IN THIS cage match, the chromed ATG-CH—touted as the world's first production aluminum arch-top—definitely broadcasts the intentions of its maker, Jim Normandy, to be “different, but not too weird or space age.” To that end, the Salem, Oregon manufacturer obviously relied on vintage designs, adding only some boss-looking “rivets” and a seemingly Russian military grade kill switch as distinctive accoutrements. Despite its metal body, I didn't find the ATG-CH to be a back buster, but, at 9.4 lbs, it's not exactly like hanging balloons around your neck, either. The wide, slim neck felt good in my hands, and nothing impeded my convulsive chording, sledgehammer riffs, or dainty melodic forays. However, the Volume knobs are placed too far out of reach—at least for me—to allow swells while picking. And while I had a blast performing its stutters with the kill switch, if you're in a

band with sensitive, singer/songwriter types, they may wince when the rock-solid switch snaps louder than the drummer's snare.

Overall, the U.S.A.-made ATG-CH is well constructed. The chromed finish is dazzling in its “hall of mirrors” majesty (although it spotlights every fingerprint, skin-oil swipe, and sweat splatter), the hardware is locked down solid, and a rounded nut is a considerate touch. However, the fret ends are rough, there were some dings and scratches on the edges of the rosewood fretboard, and the neck pocket is 1/16" larger than the neck on the cutaway side.

One of the first things you notice when strumming the ATG-CH is its loud and clear acoustic sound. The jangle has a pleasant metallic bite that is certainly less aggressive than a resonator's raspy glory, but it sounds marvelous when miked up and used to layer some articulate chime under distorted solidbody tracks. When you plug in, and go to the neck pickup, you get a deep, resonant boom along with a sharp attack that almost sounds as if you layered a Gibson ES-175 and a Fender Telecaster. The combined pickup position tames the boom a bit, and moves the snark forward to produce a taut, throaty snarl. Go for a full-on bridge-pickup tone, and you'll hear a spiky, high-midrange snap with the shimmer of a Nashville-tuned acoustic. The only downside of this metal/wood electronics gumbo is that it's very difficult to dial in a warm, trad-jazz tone, but most other sounds are animated and dimensional. This is why the ATG-CH is the perfect “Orson Welles”—a director who battled convention, and thrilled cineastes with his multi-faceted visual smorgasbords.

—Michael Molenda

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Normandy Guitars,

(503) 689-1998; normandyguitars.com

MODEL	ATG-CH
PRICE	\$3,199 retail/\$2,399 street
NUT WIDTH	1 ¹¹ / ₁₆ "
NECK	Maple, bolt-on
FRETBOARD	25.5"-scale rosewood
FRETS	22 medium jumbo
BODY	Aircraft-grade aluminum
PICKUPS	Normandy Old School humbuckers
CONTROLS	Two Volume, one Tone, 3-way pickup selector, kill switch
BRIDGE	Locking roller with Bigsby-licensed B70 tremolo
TUNERS	Gotoh
FACTORY STRINGS	Ernie Ball Slinky, .011 set
WEIGHT	9.4 lbs
KUDOS	Almost cinematic tonal spectrum. Unique finish. Plays well.
CONCERNS	Super-reflective surface can beam stage lights into your eyes—or the audience's. Minor construction issues.





The Jennifer Connelly Prestige Musician

WHAT GUITARIST DOESN'T GEEK OUT AT discovering a relatively mysterious, off-the-map instrument that totally rocks? I had no knowledge of Prestige when the Musician showed up at *GP* Central, and I grabbed the unknown guitar for a rehearsal without any expectations. But mere seconds after I plugged the Musician into the Egnater Rebel-20, I knew I had stumbled onto something magnificent. Even though it's one of the plus-sized models in this Fight Club, the guitar felt great on my shoulder, it played beautifully, and it could cover everything from jazz to rock to rockabilly to punk. It was also one tough customer. I'm not exactly a delicate player, but the Musician just shrugged at my vicious strumming, bombastic guitar-body percussion, and hummingbird-flutter Bigsby wanking. To further humble me, the Musician refused to be beaten horribly out of tune. A tweak of the Grovers here and there was all it needed to keep things tuneful.

The Canadian maker—which debuted in 2003—employs an interesting guitar-building methodology. All woods originate in Vancouver, British Columbia, where they are cut to the company's specs. Then, the woods are shipped to Inchon, South Korea for manufacturing and finishing. Ultimately, everything is sent back to Prestige's Vancouver factory for wiring, final assembly, setup, and inspection. The ping-pong production process seems to have no qualitative downside, as the Musician is an exceptionally well-made instrument. The frets are smooth and rounded, the hardware is rugged (even when banging on the pickguard, it stayed rigid), and the glossy, maraschino cherry finish is pristine.

As mentioned earlier, the Musician is a sonic "all rounder" that can take on many different guises. It doesn't quite exhibit the extreme bass-to-treble shadings of the Normandy or the Reverend, but the Musician absolutely nails more traditional jazz and rock timbres. The neck-pickup sounds, for example, are

warm and robust with just enough pop to bring fingerpicked melodic runs to the forefront. It's not quite George Benson- or Wes Montgomery-esque, but it's still a sensual tone. The dual-pickup sound was my favorite, as it offers a meaty thud *and* an airy shimmer. That may seem like a bizarre sonic combo, but the simultaneous low-midrange resonance and upper-midrange attack produced a dazzling palette of bell-like arpeggios, ringing chords, and edgy solos. The bridge tones deliver enough midrange punch for crunch chords and aggressive riffs, but they lack a bit of sparkle and dimension for convincing faux-acoustic strums. No matter—every other sound rocks hard, so why quibble? I called the Musician the "Jennifer Connelly," because it reminded me of first seeing the relatively unknown actress in the 1990 film, *The Hot Spot*. She blew me away then, she later proved her mettle with an Academy Award, and she has never stopped being a stunning presence—an arc of success that I believe the Musician will parallel. —Michael Molenda

SPECS

	Prestige Guitars, info@prestigeguitars.com ; prestigeguitars.com
MODEL	Musician
PRICE	\$1,640 retail/\$950 street
NUT WIDTH	1 ¹¹ / ₁₆ "
NECK	Mahogany, set
FRETBOARD	25.5"-scale rosewood
FRETS	20 medium
BODY	Solid maple
PICKUPS	Seymour Duncan SH1-59 (neck), SH4-JB (bridge)
CONTROLS	Two Volume, Two Tone, 3-way pickup selector
BRIDGE	Tune-o-matic-style with Bigsby-licensed tremolo
TUNERS	Grover
FACTORY STRINGS	D'Addario EXL115
WEIGHT	7.4 lbs
KUDOS	Good construction. Varied sounds. Excellent playability.
CONCERNS	Bridge tones lack a hint of sparkle.



The Samuel Jackson

PRS SE Custom Semi-Hollow Soapbar

THE PRS DESIGN TEAM WAS OBVIOUSLY OUT TO do something different with the SE Custom Semi-Hollow, but without losing the personality of the other nine models in the popular SE line. Though the Korean-made Semi-Hollow's chambered body is the key differentiator here, it shares many aspects of solidbody SE models—the set mahogany neck with its “wide/fat” carve, the 25"-scale rosewood board with 22 frets, the McCarty-style extended heel, a flat maple top with a pretty veneer of figured maple, and a lightweight aluminum Stoptail bridge. The P-90-style pickups appear only on two other SE models—the mahogany-bodied SE Soapbar and SE One—and they feed a simple control configuration of Volume, Tone, and a 3-way selector.

The Semi-Hollow sounds very in tune, in spite of its one-piece bridge, and this is partially due to PRS' use of a compensated nut that micro-adjusts the intonation to help make chords and intervals sound tuneful in all positions. It's an important aspect of this guitar, as it not only makes the instrument sound more focused, it also makes *you* sound better when you're playing it. Playing-wise, the Semi-Hollow is a gas. The gloss-finished neck has a great feel, and the lightly polished frets with their smooth ends are consistent in height to provide a buzz-free playing experience.

PRS takes this aspect seriously, too—which is why the frets are superglued in place so they can't ride up in their slots.

The Semi-Hollow's natural resonance helps create a bright, balanced voice with lots of shimmer and dimension. Used with a Victoria Golden Melody 2x12 combo, the Semi-Hollow delivered a crisp and open sound with less of the snarky midrange bite P-90s are famous for. In terms of output, the Semi-Hollow is not a particularly hot

guitar. It was less able to overdrive the Golden Melody than a humbucker-equipped Les Paul, and I also had to crank the gain on a Way Huge Pork Loin pedal to get the same amount of distortion a PRS Modern Eagle II elicited. Lower-output pickups typically have a more extended frequency response, however, and this guitar is well suited for any kind of chordal or fingerstyle playing. What the Semi's thin, chambered (and relatively feedback resistant) body gives up in resonance, it more than makes up for in lacy note detail, and the way the woods transmit their vibrations through your fingers. The Semi-Hollow delivers massive benefits for its \$649 street price, which is why it reminds us of Samuel Jackson—an immense talent who doesn't always get the mega-star paychecks, but whose performances never fail to leave you in awe. —Art Thompson

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PRS, (410) 643-9970; prsguitars.com

MODEL	SE Custom Semi-Hollow Soapbar
PRICE	\$890 retail/\$649 street
NUT WIDTH	1.7"
NECK	Mahogany, set
FRETBOARD	25"-scale rosewood
FRETS	22 medium
BODY	Chambered mahogany with maple top
PICKUPS	PRS Soapbar
CONTROLS	Volume, Tone, 3-way pickup selector
BRIDGE	PRS-designed stoptail
TUNERS	PRS die-cast
FACTORY STRINGS	D'Addario, .010-.046
EXTRAS	Wide Fat neck carve
WEIGHT	5.7 lbs
KUDOS	Great playing feel. Enhanced resonance. Very in-tune sounding.
CONCERNS	Pickups may not be hot enough for some applications.

The Tom Hanks

Reverend Club King RT

THE CLUB KING RT IS AS CLOSE TO HOLINESS AS a reverend should be. The Korean-made instrument is very well crafted, and its honey-colored top, amber-tinted neck, off-white trim, and chrome pickup covers give it a look that's simultaneously retro cool and timeless—especially when you factor in the unique and classy “shooting star” f-hole. The 3-position pickup selector and master Volume and Tone controls are arranged vertically—in the style of a certain seminal solidbody out of Fullerton, California—while the passive Bass Contour knob (more on this later) sits on the upper bout. The Volume knob is relatively easy to reach for on-the-fly adjustments, but it's a bit of a stretch for the Tone control if you like performing wah-like knob spins while picking.

The oval-shaped neck might feel a bit thick for players with smaller hands, but its satin

finish lets your hand slide freely up and down the fretboard. The frets are perfect. They're smooth, polished, and have rounded, “hot dog” ends that you can barely feel if you run your fingers along the edges of the fretboard. In fact, everything about the RT's construction is pretty much perfect. I couldn't find any flaws—even the setup was superb, right out of the box.

The Club King RT's Reverend RevTron mini-humbuckers sound fantastic, and, along with the aforementioned Bass Contour knob, you can dial in seemingly endless variations of blues, rock, jazz, funk, and country sounds. The Bass Contour adds enough bass that, when using the neck pickup with the Tone rolled off, the RT can almost sound like a baritone guitar—or like any number of evil bass motifs that warn you of danger when playing *Call of Duty* or *Left 4 Dead*. You can also crank the knob down to *reduce* bass, of course, and depending upon how you set your Volume and Tone controls (and pickup selector), the Contour can deliver anything from steely midrange punch to thin and chimey highs to an almost neutered sound that works great for crafting counterpoint lines you don't want interfering with a vocal. Every tone this guitar produced sent shivers down my spine, and, in fact, the RT sounds full, balanced, and sweetly articulate even *before* you plug it in.

The Club King RT is a superb guitar that almost feels like it *belongs* in your arms. It's nothing short of a pleasure to play—which is why it gets the “Tom Hanks” award as a “good vibes” personality who delivers masterful performances. —Reggie Singh

SPECS |

Reverend Guitars

(586) 775-1025; reverendguitars.com

MODEL Club King RT

PRICE \$899 retail/\$699 street

NUT WIDTH 1.66"

NECK Maple, bolt-on

FRETBOARD 25.5"-scale rosewood

FRETS 22 medium jumbo

BODY Korina with spruce top

PICKUPS Reverend Revtron mini-humbuckers

CONTROLS Volume, Tone, Bass Contour, 3-way pickup selector

TUNERS Reverend Pin-Lock

FACTORY STRINGS StringDog.net, .010-.046

WEIGHT 7.6 lbs

KUDOS Rich, balanced sound. Resonating lows via Bass Contour control.

CONCERNS None.

