

Words Jonathan Horsley / Photography Neil Godwin

# SOUPED-UP SINGLE-CUTS

Bolder, louder, faster, these high-power electrics take a classic design and augment it for shred and rough 'n' tumble rock





**R**epurposing classic shapes of guitar design and retooling them for contemporary contexts is all part of the game for guitar manufacturers. It's been going on since the electric guitar was born, but spiked most notably in the 80s with the hot-rodding of S-style electrics to court the shredder's dollar. The single-cut didn't undergo as extreme an 80s evolution as its S-style cousins; perhaps because, for many, a Floyd Rose or bubblegum finish on a single-cut was like the Hawaiian pizza of guitar design. But this month's round-up sees that, for all guitar archetypes,

evolutionary momentum will catch up with them eventually. Nonetheless, it's notable that these electrics from PRS, LTD, Hagstrom, and Jackson are not ostentatiously appointed. Theirs is a muted design that modernises where possible while retaining a sense of classicism. Sure, Marty Friedman's Jackson pushes the envelope with the lethal point of its 3x3 reversed headstock, but, even then, the guitar is finished in black. The PRS SE Tremonti is armed with a vibrato unit, but it's not overly iconoclastic, more a maple-topped echo of the PRS McCarty line. The Hagstrom exudes more of a 60s vibe, while the LTD's clean design belies awesome tonal power.





£539

## HAGSTROM ULTRA SWEDE

A turnip for the books

### What's this Resinator fretboard all about?

A major feature unique to Hagstrom, the Resinator comprises a wood composite that's engineered to perform similarly in terms of tone, look and feel as ebony. But Hagstrom insists that it's more reliable than your common or garden rosewood or ebony fretboard, with its uniform density eliminating dead spots on the neck.

### And, supposedly, these have the fastest necks in the world?

It's hard to measure, but throughout the Hagstrom line-up the necks are svelte and comfortable. This neck – an easy 'D' profile as



they call it – feels a little more substantial, but it's supremely comfortable and still on the right side of skinny.

### What's that little switch for?

It's a coil-split, which separates the signal from the humbuckers so that you can use a single-coil tone. They're becoming ubiquitous, typically secreted within a push/pull tone knob. It's unusual that this is the only instrument here to feature one. Incidentally, we really think that you're going to love the Hagstrom Custom 62 humbuckers' tone. They're hot and powerful, but possess a *je ne sais quoi* vintage vibe.



### AT A GLANCE

**KEY FEATURES:** Basswood body with maple top, mahogany neck (set), 628mm (24.75") scale, 22 medium jumbo frets, Resinator fretboard, 2x Hagstrom Custom 62 humbuckers, three-way pickup selector, 1x master tone, 1x master volume, coil-split switch, Long Travel Tune-O-Matic bridge with Hagstrom Stop Tailpiece

**FINISH:** Black Gloss, Cosmic Black Burst, Burgundy Burst, Golden Eagle Burst, White Tuxedo

**CONTACT:** Rosetti 01376 550033; hagstromguitars.com

£639

## JACKSON X-SERIES MARTY FRIEDMAN MF-1 SIGNATURE

The go-faster option

### Isn't Marty Friedman's signature Jackson a lot pointier?

You're thinking of the Jackson Kelly Marty Friedman signature model, as popularised by the shred genius when he was playing in Megadeth in the *Rust In Peace* era. That was a weaponised Explorer-esque model with the traditional Jackson headstock. This spear-head headstock is similarly lethal and the white bevels are a bold touch, but this is a more reserved shred machine.

### What's so special about it?

We love the understated design – it's a neat twist on Jackson's



Monarch range – but what's really great about this X-Series is that it takes Jackson's supreme playability and allies it to a hugely versatile tone, subtle when required but capable of harmonically rich rock and metal tones. Those new EMG signature pickups are great, too.

### Tell us more...

Well, they're a passive set of humbucking pickups, custom-wound with an Alnico-5 magnet, and they are, as Marty himself says, "his sound". They're hot, dynamic, and have plenty of clarity. To have these EMGs at this price point is great value.



### AT A GLANCE

**KEY FEATURES:** Nato body with maple top, mahogany neck (set), 628mm (24.75") scale, 22 jumbo frets, rosewood fretboard w/pearloid block inlay, 2x EMG MF Signature humbuckers (neck and bridge), three-way pickup selector, 2x tone, 2x master volume, Jackson Tune-O-Matic-style adjustable bridge w/locking tailpiece, Jackson Die-Cast locking tuners

**FINISH:** Gloss Black w/White Bevels

**CONTACT:** Fender EMEA 0845 305 1122; jacksonguitars.com



£850

## LTD EC-401

### Play the field, Hetfield

#### Who's this guitar for?

It might lack a contoured edge that could take your eye out, but with a set of active EMG humbuckers seated in a mahogany body, a slim neck and extra-jumbo frets offering a shred-ready instrument, it's perfect for metalheads.

#### Why reference Metallica?

The EC-401's pickup combo is a real Metallica pick. James Hetfield has his own signature set now, but for many years his preferred pickup configuration was an EMG 81 in the bridge with the EMG 60



in the neck. If you're looking for that thick, aggressive metal tone, the EC 401 has it in spades. But the 81/60 combination has plenty of range, and the bright, sharp and responsive cleans might surprise you.

#### What's the difference between active and passive pickups?

Both active and passive pickups have a similar construction, with a magnet around which coils of copper wire are wound, but active pickups have fewer winds and less output than their passive counterparts. An active pickup's signal is then boosted by a powered circuit allowing for devastating high-gain tone with less noise.



#### AT A GLANCE

**KEY FEATURES:** Mahogany body, mahogany neck (set), 628mm (24.75") scale, 22 extra-jumbo frets, rosewood fretboard w/flag inlay, 1x EMG 81 active humbucker (bridge), 1x EMG 60 active humbuckers (neck), three-way pickup selector, 1x master tone, 1x master volume, Tune-O-Matic bridge w/stop tailpiece

**FINISH:** Olympic White (as reviewed), Military Green Satin, Black

**CONTACT:** Sound Service  
esp guitars.com

£849

## PRS SE TREMONTI

### A bird in the hand

#### Aren't there a million Tremonti signature models? What's new?

The Tremonti has been a big part of the PRS SE line-up for over 10 years now, and for good reason. Here, the headstock has changed. Older models have seen the Tremonti name dominate the headstock but this time the Paul Reed Smith logo takes pride of place with Tremonti's on the truss rod cover. A set of PRS Tremonti S humbuckers replaces the original 245 humbuckers.

#### It looks heavy...

It certainly does. This new Tremonti has been hitting the gym, hard.



It's considerably chunkier – and it also comes with a thick, leather strap essential for all but the most masochistic player. All that extra wood serves a purpose, however, helping to build a thick and warm tone.

#### What's this about a Trem-Up vibrato unit?

It's a PRS design that sees a recess has been carved on the bottom of the vibrato allowing you to pull the bar away from the body and raise the pitch on the strings, very much like the Floyd Rose. It lacks the range of the Floyd Rose, however, but it has plenty of play for wanton whammy abuse.



#### AT A GLANCE

**Key features:** Mahogany body w/ maple top and flame maple veneer, maple neck (set), 635mm (25") scale, 22 frets, rosewood fretboard w/birds inlay, 2x PRS Tremonti 'S' humbuckers (neck and bridge), three-way pickup selector, 2x tone, 2x volume, PRS Patented Tremolo with Trem-Up

Route, PRS tuners

**FINISH:** Grey Black

**CONTACT:** PRS Guitars Europe 01223 874301 prsguitarseurope.com





# HEAD TO HEAD

## Making the cut with a mean shredding machine

**I**n terms of sheer power, the LTD EC-401 will take your breath away. With its pristine Olympic White finish, its three-ply binding on body and headstock, it exudes a quiet class yet deals in atom-splitting tone. Yes, the cleans are snappy, sharp and responsive in the bridge's EMG 81; bold and with great bass response in the neck's EMG 60. But this is a guitar designed to deal in maximum distortion. When using high-gain to the point of saturation, the EMG active circuitry comes into its own, killing the hum and the unwanted feedback, and delivering powerful, focused metal tone. The articulation when playing open chords is exceptional, each note ringing out. The EMG 60 trims some of the treble and the harshness, ideal for sweep-picking arpeggios, but the rendering of a powerchord in the EMG 81, or harmonic squeal, will bring out the devil in anyone.

The Jackson MF-1's EMG set is a little more traditional, calling to mind the Seymour

## THE LTD EXUDES A QUIET CLASS YET DEALS IN ATOM-SPLITTING TONE

Duncan Trembucker/Jazz combo Friedman favoured in the 90s. Allied to the nato/mahogany construction, it has a warm, organic tone, that's great for spongy blues and jazz-funk noodling, and yet aggressive and punchy when the gain is dialled up. Friedman is an eclectic player and tonally the MF-1 reflects that. Its sustain is excellent, but that is a feature of all four of these guitars.

Perhaps less metal but no less capable of it is the heavyweight Tremonti. The new PRS Tremonti S pickups articulate a classic rock tone that can be pushed deep into metal territory, but nonetheless excels in that sweet spot as the signal breaks up into pure overdrive. You could say similar for Hagstrom's Ultra Swede, but its basswood construction and lighter construction gives it a wholly different feel. More manageable? Maybe. But all four are fun to play and are giggable instruments with premium tone. How do you choose the right one for you?



Jackson X:  
supreme playability  
and versatile tone



SE Tremonti: a recess  
has been carved on  
the bottom akin to a  
Floyd Rose design



# FINAL VERDICT

Which single-cut is the right one for you?

There are no easy answers. There are many guitarists for whom the Venn diagram of their spec dreams overlap all four of these single-cut electrics. Certainly, the PRS SE Tremonti's vibrato sets it apart. Some will hate it, but it's a great vibrato, stable, neat and a lot of fun. Some players can't live without it, and that's why a Floyd Rose option is available on the MF-1 (at a price). Like the Tremonti, the MF-1 has the kudos that comes

with an elite shredder's name (or, in this instance, logo) on the headstock. Its emaciated neck plays great, though some might feel this is a guitar that's all body, at least at first.

Unlike the Tremonti, which is in the Les Paul weight category, there's a whole lot of contouring on the other three that shows mercy on the back and lightens the load. The Hagstrom's body shape and size will appeal to those who are LP-curious but balk at its

bulk, and likewise those who'll feel that the LTD, Jackson, and PRS are too overtly metal. The Ultra Swede's coil-split is a selling point – brilliant on the neck pickup, a little weedy for our ears in the bridge – and its versatility and price sets it apart. And that leaves the riff-generals, the Junior Hetfields, and those seeking the power of active EMGs on a guitar with jumbo frets and bigger tone. They'll go for the EC-401. They won't be disappointed. With these single-cuts, no-one will.

## HAGSTROM ULTRA SWEDE



## JACKSON X-SERIES MARTY FRIEDMAN MF-1 SIGNATURE



## LTD EC-401



## PRS SE TREMONTI



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

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

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	PLAYABILITY	★	★	★	★	★
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	BUILD QUALITY	★	★	★	★	★
	PLAYABILITY	★	★	★	★	★
	OVERALL RATING	★	★	★	★	★