

High Flyers

Known for their classic hollowbodies and semis, Guild's recent introductions have all been solidbodies. We track down the latest Jetstar and see how it stands up to their most famous solid, the Polara

Words Dave Burrluck Photography Adam Gasson







GUILD JETSTAR & S-100 POLARA £539 & £629

CONTACT **Selectron UK Ltd** PHONE **01795 419460** WEB **www.guildguitars.com**

What we want to Know

1

What's the story here?

Guild's latest solidbody release, the Jetstar, hones in on a simple solidbody design that first appeared in the 60s. It was the only single pickup model in a trio that included the Polara and more famous Thunderbird.

2

But this Jetstar has two pickups...

Ha, Guild aren't calling this a reissue – it's based on the body design of the Jetstar and Polara that appeared in 1963 before Guild redesigned them to the more well-known style – clearly based on Gibson's SG – that appeared in the 70s as illustrated by the S-100 we have on review too.

3

Where are these Newark St. models made?

Up to now all the Newark Sts have come from South Korea but the Jetstar is their first electric to be made in China.

Guild was rather late to the electric solidbody market, taking until 1963 before it released a trio: the twin pickup S-200 Thunderbird and S-100 Polara and the single pickup S-50 Jetstar. While all three models featured asymmetrical three-a-side headstocks they borrowed from previous designs: the S-200 had clear Jazzmaster/Jaguar style, the S-100 and S-50 a more conservative offset dual cutaway shape.

All three had a concave cutaway on their bases, while the S-200 and S-100 even included built-in flip-out stands on their backs. They lasted through the decade, before Guild took a more Gibson SG-like route with its 70s solidbody range.

The 70s-era S-100 Polara was the only solidbody in the relaunched-by-Fender line back in 1963. It was joined in 2016 by the out-there 60s-style S-200 T-Bird (née Thunderbird) followed, in 2017, by a more conventional 'ST' version that swapped the Hagstrom vibrato for a regular tune-o-matic and stud tailpiece, along with paring back the T-Bird's original-style internal circuitry.

The new Jetstar comes again in 60s style, although its S-50 designation has been lost and the days of it being a single pickup guitar have been consigned to history. So how does this new model stack up against that original S-100?

Let's take a look...



1. Like many modern Guild guitars, the Jetstar uses Guild's mini-humbucking LB-1 pickups with seemingly mismatched DCRs of 5.14 kohms (bridge) and 7.37 kohms (neck) caused by different gauge coil wire

THE RIVALS

All roads point to Gibson's SG – the 2018 SG Standard is streeting around £1,000 and comes in Autumn Shade, Ebony and Heritage Cherry and includes Gibson USA fitted hardcase. Epiphone's G-400 Pro SG (approximate street price, £380) loads in Alnico Classic Pro humbuckers and coil splits – a great way to experience the SG flavour and a favorite for budding Derek Trucks slide wannabes.

The Viper is ESP's offset SG-alike, the LTD Viper 256 (approximate street price, £330) in See Thru Black Cherry chases a classic SG vibe but with master volume and tone. ESP has just changed distributor so stocks and prices will currently vary, while Vintage has the more Guild-like VS6 available in various formats and colours from approximately £309 and with vibrato, as the VS6V, for £429.

On paper both guitars share a quoted all-mahogany construction (hidden under the opaque finish), glued-in necks, pau ferro fingerboards – originally the S-100 had a rosewood 'board but was changed, from mid-2018, to avoid the added complication caused by the latest CITES import/export restrictions – and dual pickups. However, there are plenty of differences, not least that the Jetstar is Chinese-made while the S-100 is still Korean-made like the rest of the Guild Newark Sts (although different factories are used for different models). There is another fundamental difference in that the Jetstar, unlike the 60s original, uses a longer Fender-style 648mm (25.5-inch) scale; the S-100, and most of the other Guild

The S-100 Polara sticks more closely to its 70s incarnation, with a more deluxe vibe and an enhanced versatility

electrics, use a Gibson-style 629mm (24.75-inch) scale.

Taking its cue from the 60s S-50, the dual-cutaway body design retains a depth of 38mm (the same as the Polara), that curved base, as well as comfort contours on both the treble and bass-side rear waist. Meanwhile the back-angled, reverse six-in-a-line headstock, which appeared back in 1966, gives the model considerable style.



2

A major difference, of course, is that the Jetstar has two small humbucking Guild LB-1 pickups (which actually make it more like the original 60s-era S-100) although the scratchplate-mounted volume, tone controls and output jack are retained and augmented, obviously, by a three-way toggle pickup selector at the treble-side tip. Two colours are offered: Black and White with a tortoiseshell scratchplate and Seafoam Green with a white plastic scratchplate.

The Newark St. S-100 Polara certainly sticks more closely to its 70s incarnation. Again offered in a choice of colours, Cherry Red translucent and solid Black and White – all with the same black pickguard and Guild logo – there's a more deluxe vibe with a cream bound fingerboard, large pearloid block inlays and the classic dome-topped Guild head with that 70s-style solid 'Chesterfield' logo. Scale length aside, it's the Polara's dual, full-size Guild HB-1 humbuckers – each with their own rear-mounted volume and tone controls – that give it enhanced versatility over the now entry level Jetstar.

Feel & Sounds

These decade apart designs offer rather different feels. Weight-wise neither is overdone, the Jetstar slightly heavier than the Polara, which, bearing in mind its quite broad body (that makes the Polara look quite svelte in comparison), is not surprising. The bridge of the Jetstar sits lower down on the body and the neck exits at the 18th fret; the Polara's neck leaves around the 20th/21st fret and, despite having quite a chunky heel, allows easier



3

2. Like the second pickup here, the Jetstar never used this more contemporary 'off the shelf' bridge/tailpiece set-up. That said, it's a typically efficient set-up: replicating hardware from the 60s can be expensive and not always successful for the modern player

3. This second version headstock shape appeared in the mid-60s. The original model, like the Polara and Thunderbird, had a three-a-side asymmetrical design



4. These larger HB-1 humbuckers have an extra tilt screw on the bass side. Unlike the Alnico 5 magnets of the LB-1, these use Alnico 2 and, like the LB-1s, are made in Korea by BooHeung

access to the top fret, not least with those off-set cutaways. Played seated, the Polara feels like its inspiration, the Gibson SG, in that the neck seems very long. The difference in feel is compounded by the upper strap button position: the Polara's is on the back of the heel so the guitar tips the fingerboard away from you more than the more conventional bass-side horn button placement of the Jetstar.

Again there are differences in terms of the necks: the Jetstar's is very slightly wider (but has the same string spacing of 35.5mm at the nut, 51.5mm at the bridge) and is a little deeper, too. Profile-wise the Jetstar has a little more shoulder, the Polara a more relaxed classic C. Measuring the fingerboard radius reveals a slightly tighter

254mm (10-inch) camber on both the Jetstar and the Polara (the latter is spec'd as 305mm/12 inches) but, more importantly, the Polara uses a narrow tall wire (2.24 x 1.35-1.4mm) compared to the wider and flatter wire on the Jetstar (2.74 x 1.1-1.8mm). Differences aside both 'boards are nicely done with slightly rounded edges, the frets of the Polara sitting over the binding, while the ends of the fret tangs on the Jetstar are cleanly filed.

Interesting, too, are the acoustic voices: the S-100 has a little more vibrancy, the Jetstar's slightly more hollowed sounding with a subtly slower attack. The open-backed Grover three-a-side tuners on the Polara also feel a little more positive than the marginally softer feeling six-in-a-line



A COPY... OR NOT?

From the original designs of the Thunderbird, Polara and Jetstar in the 60s, the turnaround to the 70s solidbodies, like our S-100 here, was an obvious attempt to capture some of Gibson's SG market. Gretsch had already been inspired by the bevel-edged SG with its 1963 Corvette, taken to out-there extremes with the 1966 Astro-Jet.

But although these second-wave Guild 'copy' models debuted in 1970, by 1977 a new original design in the form of the 24-fret S-300 and S-60 had replaced them. Gibson did take action against Hoshino in the late 70s and the US was awash with import lookalikes, but there's no documented evidence of any litigation between Gibson and Guild so, perhaps, as *The Guild Guitar Book* author Hans Moust suggests, the new late-70s shape was simply a "serious attempt to come up with something original".

As Guild found in the 70s, it seems to be the case that as long as you offset that SG body, as illustrated by ESP's Viper design and Vintage's VS6 with its "ingeniously designed drop shoulder and offset heel", you can sidestep any legal issues even though there's no dispute where the idea originally came from.

split post Kluson-style of the Jetstar. While the bridges seem identical there's the stud tailpiece of the Jetstar closely placed behind compared to the more distant, angled anchor block of the Polara. Factor in the scale length differences and all these subtle differences begin to add up.

Even if both guitars shared the same scale and hardware geometry you'd still expect a difference between the original small humbucking LB-1 pickups on the Jetstar to the later larger HB-1 humbuckers on the S-100. Then there's the vintage wiring of the S-100 with 223J (0.22microfarad) tone caps – not least with a volume and tone for each pickup – over the modern wiring of the Jetstar with its larger 473J (0.47microfarad) tone cap and, of course, master volume and tone. The net result is two quite different guitars.

We've discussed the 'mismatch' of the Guild LB-1 pickups (*Mod Squad*, issue 436) and we'd suggest you give it a go: raise the bridge nice and close to the strings with a little bass-to-treble tilt and pull the neck down, especially on the bass side, and you'll easily find a balance. Along with that comes a huge width of sound from the stinging big single coil-like voice at the bridge to the darker, textured neck and a sprightly and

vibrant mix that has a lot of Fender in there – maybe the longer scale is adding its mojo? As a Newark St. Starfire user, this writer feels very at home here – there's plenty of 60s jangle, that bridge really spans for instrumental leads yet it can do mellow jazz at neck at the flick of that pickup toggle. The volume and tone work as you'd expect; you damp some highs with volume reduction and the tone takes a while to kick in but neither bothered us in the least.

Plugging in the S-100 we go up a notch in juice. There's a noticeable PAF-y quality here with a little airy chime evident on both pickups, and the mix. The bridge has more depth, it's more humbucking but in an early sense – it's far from overwound. The neck, too, while not as such more powerful just has a hint more clarity. The wiring style plays its part as the volumes are quite sensitive – a small pull back cleans up the

The Jetstar bridge really spans for instrumental leads yet it can do mellow jazz using the toggle



5



6

5. The S-100 trades a vibrato for a standard tune-o-matic bridge

6. With two hefty screws, this angled chromed metal bar firmly anchors the strings to the body with no moving parts



8

sound for some lovely quite single coil-like, snappy blues voices while the tones are a little more useful, certainly with the volume near or fully up. As ever the controls expand the voice considerably: a vintage-y clean 'bucker voice that might lack the heft of a thicker mahogany/maple-topped single-cut but which sits firmly in the classic rock genre. It has more than enough clarity without sounding sterile for gained voices and so long as you use those controls you can access a host of classic sounds.

Verdict

Dropping into one of the most competitive market slots, the Jetstar has plenty going for it. It's not quite an impulse buy – but the very sensible price buys you a competent build and a distinctive retro vibe that's matched by the sounds we hear. Add a decent gigbag and it emerges as a fun guitar with plenty of serious application.

The S-100, now a cornerstone of modern Guild, raises the bar a little, not just cosmetically but sonically, too, with less of the quirks of the Jetstar and a nicely vintage voice that's definitely in the cleaner, low-output range. At £629 it's a steal for all manner of classic and roots rock – and quite a bit more besides. **G**

8. Quite closely spaced, Guild's four control layout here uses 'vintage' style wiring, creating a slightly different drive than the Jetstar. If you don't like it, it's easy to change



GUILD JETSTAR

PRICE: £539
ORIGIN: China
TYPE: Offset double-cutaway solidbody electric
BODY: Mahogany
NECK: Mahogany, 'C' profile, glued-in
SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")
NUT/WIDTH: Bone/43.4mm
FINGERBOARD: Pau ferro, 5mm mother of pearl dot inlays, 254mm (10") radius
FRETS: 22, narrow jumbo
HARDWARE: Nickel-plated tune-o-matic-style with stud tailpiece, vintage-style tuners
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 51.5mm
ELECTRICS: 2x Guild LB-1 mini humbuckers, three-way toggle pickup selector, master volume and tone
WEIGHT (KG/LB): 3.52/7.74
OPTIONS: None
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISHES: Black (as reviewed), Seafoam Green and Vintage white – all gloss polyurethane

Selectron UK Ltd
01795 419460
www.guildguitars.com

8/10

PROS Original body and headstock style, great width of sounds, weight and playability

CONS For the money, not a lot, plus there's plenty of modding scope too



GUILD S-100 POLARA

PRICE: £629 (inc gigbag)
ORIGIN: Korea
TYPE: Offset double-cutaway solidbody electric
BODY: Mahogany
NECK: Mahogany, vintage soft 'U' profile, glued-in
SCALE LENGTH: 629mm (24.75")
NUT/WIDTH: Bone/43.1mm
FINGERBOARD: Bound pau ferro, pearloid block inlays, 305mm (12") radius
FRETS: 22, narrow jumbo
HARDWARE: Nickel-plated Guild tune-o-matic-style with stud tailpiece, Grover Sta-Tite 18:1 ratio open-backed tuners
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 51.5mm
ELECTRICS: 2x Guild HB-1 humbuckers, three-way toggle pickup selector, individual pickup volume and tone controls
WEIGHT (KG/LB): 3.20/7
OPTIONS: None
RANGE OPTIONS: The other Guild NS solidbodies are the vibrato-equipped S-200 T-Bird (£809) and the same model with simplified electronics and hard-tail, the T-Bird ST (£759)
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISHES: White (as reviewed), Black and translucent Cherry Red – all gloss polyurethane



9/10

PROS Price, 'deluxe' style, nice repros of original HB-1 humbuckers, weight and resonance

CONS Aside from the fact that Guild no longer produces a case for this guitar, it's a cool enough piece