





# All Mod Cons

Typecast by history, the 65-year-old classic that inspired George Harrison, Steve Marriott and Jeff Beck gets a modern makeover, and a powerful new voice...

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Words Ed Mitchell Photography Joby Sessions



## GRETSCH PROFESSIONAL SERIES G6228FM PLAYERS EDITION JET BT & G6131T PLAYERS EDITION JET FT £2,099 & £2,049

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### What we want to know

**1 Nice looking guitars. Shame I don't play rockabilly...**

Dismiss these new Players Edition Jets at your peril. They might look like 50s throwbacks but Gretsch has tweaked these Jets to provide more contemporary playability and tone.

**2 So, Gretsch are going after the Gibson punters with these things?**

Well, sometimes actions speak louder than words. The G6228FM BT model in particular has more of a rock feel and voice than you expect from a 50s spec Jet. Let's just say that the Les Paul Standard has some fresh competition.

**3 Jets are basically Les Paul rip-offs anyway, right?**

The original '53 Duo Jet was released as a direct challenge to the Les Paul model unveiled the previous year. Under the skin however, the Gretsch's chambered body makes it a very different animal to Lester's squeeze. Besides, the '52 Les Paul couldn't match the '53 Jet's playability. So, let's call it a draw...

**T**he term 'player grade' can confuse novice guitar geeks. "Surely, all guitars are designed to be played?" they cry. However, 'player grade' is a marketing term vintage dealers use to describe a guitar that's been dragged kicking and screaming through the past few decades yet still shows signs of life.

It might be an old Gibson SG Junior with a repaired neck break or a set of non-original Grover tuners. Maybe you've seen a 70s Fender Strat some callous ne'er do well chiselled out for humbuckers back in the day thanks to Eddie Van Halen. It's a guitar

that's fallen foul of shifts in fashion and really shouldn't fetch the same money as an unmolested example.

These new Gretsch Players Edition G6228FM BT and G6131T FT Jets promise all the fateful mods we hope to see in player grade vintage guitars (bigger frets, great tuners, upgraded hardware) without the senseless brutality. Nose through the spec sheets and among the locking tuners and modern-style strap locks, you'll see that these guitars are classic single-cutaway, chambered mahogany and laminate maple-topped Duo Jets.



1. The G6228FM BT defies Jet convention with a stop tailpiece and anchored Adjusto-Matic bridge. The V-shaped tailpiece has been previously seen on the affordable Gretsch Streamliner and Electromatic guitars. Partnered with its bridge, it gives this Jet more sustain than experienced in previous models

2. Don't let that old school '53-era script logo fool you, the G6228FM BT is more modern rock beast than retro rocker. It takes care of business when it comes to tuning stability too thanks to a set of Gotoh locking machineheads...



That should be all we need to say, yet already there's an interesting tweak to bring to your attention. Any true Gretsch nut will tell you that original 50s and 60s Jets have highly resonant 51mm (2 inch) deep bodies; as a result, the recent spec-correct Vintage Select reissue Jets also plumb those depths. The remaining Professional Series Jets ship with a depth of 44.45mm (1.75 inches) and that's been the case for almost 30 years.

However, our G6228FM BT and G6131T FT, and the rest of the Players Edition range, are 47mm (1.85 inches) deep. You'd think that, considering that the idea is to cut these Jets for better handling, building them thinner would make more sense. Adding depth to the body can compromise access to the upper frets.

It's not immediately obvious but Gretsch has made the additional, albeit slight, body depth work by setting each guitar's mahogany neck deeper into its body. Upper fret access is actually easier on these Players Edition Jets than any of the other Professional Series examples. The neck mod isn't the only Players Edition family trait set to leave the purists in distress.

Look closer and you'll notice that both guitars feature an anchored Adjusto-Matic bridge. Now, the whole 'which Gretsch bridge design sucks the least' thing isn't just a bone of contention, it's the whole bloody skeleton. Just about every Gretsch shipped from the US and Japanese factories over the past 60 odd years has had a floating bridge held in place by the tension of the strings. Some guitars had the ridiculously over-

engineered '51 to '58 Melita (aka Synchro-Sonic) bridge, others brandished the equally-maligned 60s Space Control effort.

The consensus among the Jet cognoscenti is that the infinitely more primitive '58 bar bridge, favoured by George Harrison, was the pick of the litter. The thing is, no matter which bridge you end up with, they can all be dislodged by a barrage of over-exuberant rhythm chops. To counter this some players, including Gretsch patron saint and Stray Cat Brian Setzer, have their floating bridges pinned down to prevent slippage. The Adjusto-Matic bridge fitted to these Jets dispenses with the floating format altogether. Instead, the bridge spans two height-adjustable posts set directly into each guitar's top, just like another famous single cutaway 50s survivor.

Looking at each new guitar as an individual, the red-topped G6131T FT is clearly a hot-rodged 50s-style Jet Firebird. It has the same model number after all, not to mention the Filter'Tron humbuckers and neo-classical 'thumbnail' inlaid Rosewood fingerboard that marked the arrival of the

**Gretsch has made the additional body depth work by setting the necks deeper, making upper fret access easier**

## THE RIVALS



### Gibson Les Paul Standard £1,999

The G6228FM BT's greatest rival has Heritage Cherry Sunburst lacquer, contoured Maple and well-liked Burstbucker pickups, making it as much of a contender as it's ever been.



### Supro Martinique Deluxe £1,199

The Supro features a semi-hollow body topped with an Acoustic-Glass shell. It might look like the love child of a Wurlitzer jukebox and an Art Deco lamp but the playability is surprisingly modern.



### Guild Bluesbird £899

Maple-topped with a chambered Mahogany body, this underrated classic is still available in a Far East-built edition. Retro looks and some twin humbucker firepower from makes this a versatile little rock machine.

'58 'Bird. The T in any Gretsch catalogue designation means you get a tremolo. Closer inspection reveals that the Bigsby True Vibrato you get here is the modified B7CP String-Thru version, which is a damn sight quicker to restring than the old school stuff.

Shifting our focus to the G6228FM BT, this Jet isn't based on any particular ancestor. Yes, the script headstock logo and big block fingerboard inlays are lifted from the Vintage Select '53 Duo Jet but the stylish 'V' stop tailpiece is a feature found within the more affordable Streamliner and Electromatic ranges. It echoes the classic Cadillac tailpiece found on some White Falcons and Penguins and we have to say, it looks great on the G6228FM BT. The 'FM' in the model designation references the 'Tiger Flame Maple' top. Gretsch has employed flame maple on special run G6120s and Setzer Signature models recent past but it's still an unusual sight on a Jet.



3. The G6161T Jet also features a direct mounted tune-o-matic style bridge. This time it's partnered with a Bigsby B7CP String-Thru True Vibrato. It might look like vintage but this version is modified to make it easier to string

### Sounds & Feel

The 'FT' attached to the G6131T's model designation refers to its classic Filter'Tron pups. The G6228FM's 'BT' tag reveals that it's harbouring something a bit more mysterious, a pair of new Broad'Tron BT65 humbuckers designed by ex-Gibson and now-Fender pickup swami Tim Shaw.

This Shaw character is well-known among Gibson pickup fetishists thanks to the humbuckers he produced for a fair old chunk of the 1980s. It shouldn't be too much of a surprise then when we reveal the Broad'Tron BT65s loaded into the G6228FM BT owe more sonically to an overwound PAF than something you'd expect from TV Jones. As we've already established, this Jet isn't looking for a

position in a Beatles tribute band. Thanks to the late Malcolm Young of AC/DC we know just how well a Filter'Tron takes care of business when the gain is cranked. The G6228FM BT has way more thump in the bottom end than twang and a more pronounced midrange that really comes in handy when you get into the real heavy stuff. This one is even more for brother Angus' speed. Oh, and this is the first Jet you can play metal on. A real wolf in sheep's clothing if ever there was one.

By way of contrast, the G6131T behaved exactly as expected. It nails Beatlemania, Small Faces and *Highway To Hell*, and has enough air in its chambers to pull off a respectable *Stray Cat Strut*. We like that the wiring loom and its flame maple compadre has been kept simple: two volume, a No-Load tone, master volume and three-way pickup selector. As much as we love the retro vibe of the classic Gretsch three-way tone switch we don't miss it here.

In all the best ways, this guitar is easier to handle than our own regular Professional Series Jet Firebird. In fact, the upper frets are closer to hand, and there's a discernible increase in sustain both acoustically and amped, likely thanks to the anchored bridge. Dropping the neck height has definitely made these guitars feel more approachable. Figure in the classic Jet 'U' profile neck – a pleasantly plump C – along with the 305mm (12-inch) fingerboard radius and the exceptionally well-dressed frets and these are the best playing Jets yet.

The G6228FM BT has more thump than twang and a more pronounced midrange is handy for the real heavy stuff





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### Verdict

The Players Edition Jets might be members of the same family but like the Corleone brothers, the G6131T FT and G6228FM BT have very different personalities. Yes, it's been tweaked to streamline its performance but tonally at least, the G6131T FT is a good old-fashioned Duo Jet. The G6228FM BT is more like a 2018 Ford Mustang. You get the curb appeal of the vintage original but the power and performance are as contemporary as it gets. This is the Jet you buy instead of a Les Paul or ESP Eclipse.

As ever with the Professional Series, playability, tone, build quality, even value for money are so consistently excellent that we could have cut and pasted this sentence from any of our previous reviews. We also love that Gretsch has lifted some features from its more affordable ranges. The V stop tailpiece from the Streamliner and Electromatic stuff looks right at home on the G6228FM BT, and both Players Edition guitars reap the benefits of the anchored tune-o-matic-style bridge that has been present on those mid-price Gretsches for a good few years now.

Unless you're one of those people that think music died when Elvis was drafted into the US Army, these primped, modded and player-centric Jets should suit you right down to the ground. **G**

4. Despite the modern tweaks, both Jets still feature some vintage eye candy. For example, the G6228FM's ebony fingerboard has '53-style big block inlays while the G6131T's rosewood 'board is home to the Neo-classical 'thumbnail' inlays that made their debut in 1958



### GRETSCH G6228FM PLAYERS EDITION JET BT

**PRICE:** £2,099 (inc case)  
**ORIGIN:** Japan  
**TYPE:** Single-cutaway electric guitar  
**BODY:** Chambered mahogany back with laminated tiger flame maple top  
**NECK:** Mahogany, glued-in  
**SCALE LENGTH:** 625mm (24.6")  
**NUT/WIDTH:** Graph Tech Tusq XL/43mm  
**FINGERBOARD:** Ebony, 305mm (12") radius  
**FRETS:** 22, medium jumbo  
**HARDWARE:** Chrome-anchored Adjusto-Matic bridge, V stop tailpiece, Gotoh locking tuners  
**STRING SPACING, BRIDGE:** 51mm  
**ELECTRICS:** 2x Gretsch Broad'Tron BT65 humbuckers, 2x volumes, master tone and volume, three-way pickup selector toggle switch  
**WEIGHT (KG/LB):** 3.2/7.4  
**OPTIONS:** No  
**RANGE OPTIONS:** G6228 Players Edition Jet BT with V stop tailpiece in Black, Cadillac Green and Deep Cherry Metallic (£1,979)  
**LEFT HANDERS:** G6228LH Players Edition Jet BT with V stop tailpiece and Rosewood fingerboard in Cadillac Green (£2,179)  
**FINISHES:** Dark Cherry Stain (as reviewed), Bourbon Stain

**Guitarist CHOICE** 9/10

**PROS** Like a retro-mod car: underneath that beautifully executed shell lurks a slaving beast with a new voice

**CONS** Gain heads and classic rockers will love the pickups. Gretsch geeks not so much



### GRETSCH G6131T PLAYERS EDITION JET FT

**PRICE:** £2,049 (inc case)  
**ORIGIN:** Japan  
**TYPE:** Single-cutaway electric guitar  
**BODY:** Chambered mahogany back with laminated maple top  
**NECK:** Mahogany, glued-in  
**SCALE LENGTH:** 625mm (24.6")  
**NUT/WIDTH:** TUSQ XL/43mm  
**FINGERBOARD:** Rosewood 305mm (12") radius  
**FRETS:** 22 medium jumbo  
**HARDWARE:** Chrome-anchored Adjusto-Matic bridge, Bigsby B7CP String-Thru True Vibrato, Gotoh locking tuners  
**STRING SPACING, BRIDGE:** 51mm  
**ELECTRICS:** 2 x Gretsch Filter'Tron humbuckers, 2 x volumes, master tone, master volume and three-way pickup selector toggle switch  
**WEIGHT (KG/LB):** 3.7/8.3  
**OPTIONS:** None  
**RANGE OPTIONS:** G6128T Players Edition Jet FT with Bigsby in Black (£2,049), G6129T Players Edition Jet FT with Bigsby in Silver Sparkle (£2,049)  
**LEFT HANDERS:** G6128TLH Players Edition Jet FT with Bigsby in Black (£2,259)  
**FINISHES:** Firebird Red (as reviewed) and translucent Cherry Red – all gloss polyurethane

8/10

**PROS** A cool concept fully realised, a prime example of how to update a classic without obliterating what makes the original so loved

**CONS** We miss some of the vintage appointments, especially the cute Gretsch strap buttons