





FIRST PLAY



HERITAGE H-150
£2,459

WHAT IS IT? A Les Paul clone with the 'wrong' headstock and Seymour Duncan '59 humbuckers



HERITAGE H-535
£2,755

WHAT IS IT? A classic ES-335-style semi with the 'wrong' headstock and Seymour Duncan Seth Lover humbuckers

The Right Stuff

Follow a classic recipe and build to a high standard in a historic location – what have you got? Heritage Guitar Inc, a rejuvenated 34-year-old brand

Words David Burrluck **Photography** Phil Barker

At various points since 1985, Heritage has provided a very valid alternative to Gibson – building its guitars in a purchased space of Gibson's historic Kalamazoo factory, and, originally, with some key senior ex-Gibson employees on the team. Its guitars have been a rare sight in the UK over the past decade, but new owners in 2016 signified a seemingly revitalised company, and now its streamlined range has proper distribution here, too.

Now, as then, it's *that* heritage that is the biggest pull for many. Somehow, guitars built in the same location as those of the 50s and 60s classics must be as good, if not better, than the Gibsons themselves. Ironically, at times the almost-ramshackle production facilities and original machinery proved just as variable



1. Seymour Duncan's '59 is a modern classic used by numerous brands. Designed in the "spirit of the original PAF humbuckers of the 1950s", they use Alnico 5 magnets and are wax-potted with a DCR of 7.98k (bridge) and 7.31k (neck) measured at output. These and the Seth Lovers are wound on Seymour's Leeson 102 pickup winding machine, "the very one that was used in the Gibson factory in Kalamazoo, in the 1950s", we're told

2. Apparently, Heritage is now using Plek technology to fine-tune the nut, frets and setup, although it's not advertised. Either way, both guitars were ready to go out of the box

3. Once correctly set, both the tune-o-matic and stud tailpiece can be locked in place, which helps vibration transfer – and they won't fall off when you're restringing

in terms of quality and consistency as the company Heritage aimed to emulate. Apparently, today – although it's not advertised by the company – Heritage's current production includes a Plek machine and has evolved from the more traditional, historic craft of the brand's prior years.

Pulling the H-150 from its case, it's very clear that Heritage isn't messing around. This is one very smartly built Les Paul-alike. Obvious changes are the slightly downsized and rounded treble horn, the straight-sided yet very functional headstock, and uniquely shaped pickguard. Get over those features and you're in for a treat. Of course, its opaque black nitro gloss finish hides any wood identification (and is rather oddly priced the same as the other colours that show off nicely flamed maple tops), although if our H-535 is anything to go by, we'd wager the neck is one-piece mahogany. There's no mention of any weight relief and it comes in on the heavier but acceptable side at 4.14kg (9.1lb).

Likewise, the H-535's inspiration is blindingly obvious and, just like the H-150, it features that Heritage headstock, which is thicker (17mm) and untapered, probably due to its smaller size, unlike the classic guitar it clones. It's relatively light in weight





(3.51kg/7.72lb), something that can't be said for many contemporary ES-335s we've had through our hands in recent years. It uses a three-ply figured maple-faced pressed laminate for the top and back, while the sides – as they always have been on this Heritage model – are solid figured maple, bent into shape like a solid-sided acoustic, along with quite large mahogany kerfed linings. The centre block is maple with spruce 'pads', as Heritage calls them, to match the curve of the top/back to the block. The rise of the top and back seems slightly flatter than anything we have for comparison, with a fairly common rim depth of around 42mm, which actually appears smaller due to the deep (8mm) single-ply binding, and an overall depth of around 58mm. Along with a neck pitch that means the tune-o-matic sits virtually flush to the body (the H-150's is slightly higher), there really is a lovely classic guitar vibe here that's very nicely done.

Actually, 'nicely done' pretty well sums up the build of both of these guitars, not least the necks, which have a very similar width and depth (21.5mm at the 1st fret filling out to 23.7mm at the 12th) with a full, slightly flat-backed C profile. As supplied with a string height of 1.2mm on the treble side

and 1.5mm on the bass, and measured at the 12th fret, both are a little too low for us, but the fretwork is immaculate with slight and well-shaped nibs to the fret ends, while the medium-gauge wire is around 2.6mm wide with a low, classic height of a shade over 1mm. The deep, dark rosewood fingerboard has a radius that's quoted as 305mm (12 inches) like Gibson; the scale length comes in at around 624mm (24.6 inches), slightly shorter than the quoted 629mm (24.75 inches) – again, just like Gibson.

Unlike the current slew of 2019 Gibson models, such as the Standard with its hugely expanded wiring, Heritage ploughs an old-school furrow with a pair of industry standard covered and potted Seymour Duncan '59s on the H-150. The H-535 goes for the equally renowned unpotted Duncan Seth Lovers. Neither has any wiring tricks: the H-150 clearly uses modern wiring with

500k CTS pots and .022microfarad Vishay tone caps; we presume the H-535 is the same.

Hardware on both is identical, too, with Grover tuners, a TonePros-style die-cast zinc locking stud tailpiece and an aluminium Nashville-style tune-o-matic with titanium saddles and slot-head post caps to lock it firmly in place and made, we believe, by Advanced Plating in the USA.

Feel & Sounds

Don't expect any surprises here. Like the classic builds that both guitars emulate, they immediately hit the spot, from their crisp ring and vibrancy unplugged, to necks that feel like many you've played before and enjoyed, and a huge sense of overall familiarity. Plugging in, you notice another change on the H-535: its output jack is sensibly side-mounted (not top-mounted), but, really, aside from that, it does ES-335 to a T, treading that middle ground between solidbody and hollowbody and creating a hugely unique voice that balances snappy, percussive old-style electric blues with surprising meat and power.

Quickly swapping to the H-150, that meat and power becomes more focused and, of course, the different sizes, weights and playing feels are as much a part of the

Don't expect any surprises here. Like the classic builds they emulate, these guitars hit the spot



difference as the sounds themselves. The '59 humbuckers are certainly at home on this platform with a more contemporary sizzle, while on lower-gained and clean amp voices they have an almost single-coil-like clarity. Like the H-535's Seth Lovers, these drop into the vintage output category and seem a perfect choice.

Setups on both guitars are superb, not least the beautifully cut Corian nuts. And, to be honest, aside from slightly raising the string heights, we'd take either of these straight to a gig and not look back. They really do what the tin says – effortlessly.

This writer would certainly prefer vintage wiring on both models, but not everyone constantly fiddles with their controls and that's a quick fix with a soldering iron. Both sets of volumes, for example, mute the highs a little too much as you pull them back, and the almost generic choice of pickups

It's the light weight and beautiful delicacy of the H-535 that wins the day over the perfectly good H-150



4. "A calibrated set of the most faithful PAFs available, built exactly the way Seth Lover intended for a smooth and sweet tone," says Seymour Duncan of these Seth Lovers. A 2.5-inch Alnico 2 bar magnet and unpotted nickel silver cover gives the tone "an almost piano-like percussive feel". We'd certainly agree with that!

5. Heritage uses a three-piece maple laminate for the back and sides, which is visible on the unbound 'f' holes. The sides, however, are thin solid maple

6. Another subtle difference is the side placement of the output jack: you don't need that right-angled jack any more





probably won't satisfy the true cork-sniffing PAF-ophiles. And while Heritage's own-design pickups would offer a less generic flavour adding to the allure, there is very little that we couldn't work with here.

It is, however, the light weight and beautiful delicacy of the H-535 that wins the day over the perfectly good H-150. And yet both are hugely rewarding and an absolute pleasure to endorse.

Verdict

If you're looking for innovation and sonic diversity, you won't find it here. What you will find, however, are two examples of benchmark guitars that hold their own with the mighty G. How, or indeed where, the instruments are made doesn't appreciably interest us: it's the end result that matters and these are exemplary pieces and nicely priced under their major competitor, too. If Heritage can add in consistency and keep its dealer network happy, here's a brand that we almost lost but could well be on for a rather rosy future. A little vintage-y fairy dust applied to both wouldn't go amiss, bearing in mind the current obsession of many players to pretend its 1959, but to the majority, these are 100 per cent fit-for-purpose tools of our trade. **G**



HERITAGE H-150

PRICE: £2,459 (inc case)

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Single-cut, solidbody electric

BODY: Carved maple top,

mahogany back

NECK: Mahogany, 'standard' profile, glued-in

SCALE LENGTH: 625mm (24.6")

NUT/WIDTH: Corian/42.46mm

FINGERBOARD: Bound rosewood, trapezoid inlays

FRETS: 22, Jescar medium jumbo
HARDWARE: Nashville-style locking tune-o-matic bridge; locking stud tailpiece. Gotoh Rotomatic tuners – nickel-plated

STRING SPACING/BRIDGE: 50.5mm

ELECTRICS: Seymour Duncan covered '59 at neck and bridge, 3-way toggle pickup selector switch, individual pickup volume and tone controls

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 4.14/9.1

OPTIONS: None

RANGE OPTIONS: The other solidbody in the current range is the single-cut Les Paul Special-style H-137 (£1,869), in TV Yellow and Original Sunburst with dog-ear Lollar P-90s

LEFT-HANDERS: Not currently advertised

FINISHES: Dirty Lemon Burst, Original Sunburst, Vintage Cherry Sunburst, Ebony (as reviewed) – gloss nitrocellulose

Westside Distribution

0844 326 2000

<https://heritageguitars.com>

8/10

PROS Smart build, neck shape, fretwork and setup with classic sounds to match

CONS It's (yet) another close cousin to the Les Paul and might simply be too generic for some; headstock shape is a little polarising



HERITAGE H-535

PRICE: £2,755 (inc case)

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Double-cutaway, centre-blocked semi

BODY: Laminated maple top and back, solid maple sides, with maple centre block

NECK: Mahogany, 'standard' profile, glued-in

SCALE LENGTH: 629mm (24.75")

NUT/WIDTH: Corian/43.3mm

FINGERBOARD: Bound rosewood, trapezoid inlays

FRETS: 22, Jescar medium jumbo
HARDWARE: Nashville-style locking tune-o-matic bridge; locking stud tailpiece. Gotoh Rotomatic tuners – nickel-plated

STRING SPACING/BRIDGE: 50.5mm

ELECTRICS: Seymour Duncan Seth Lover at neck and bridge, 3-way toggle pickup selector switch, individual pickup volume and tone controls

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.51/7.72

OPTIONS: None

RANGE OPTIONS: The more ES-330-style H-530 (£2,849) is joined by the H-575 (£3,429), Heritage's take on the ES-175. The Eagle Classic (£4,239) drops into classic archtop territory with solid Sitka spruce top construction

LEFT-HANDERS: Not currently advertised

FINISHES: Antique Natural (as reviewed), Original Sunburst, Trans Cherry, Ebony – gloss nitrocellulose



9/10

PROS Like the H-150, this thinline semi is smartly made; excellent weight, feel and sounds

CONS Again, it's not bringing anything new to the table and not everyone will enjoy the headstock. Get over it!