

Words Ed Mitchell / Photography Neil Godwin

GIBSON 2019 MODERN COLLECTION

With Gibson hitting the headlines for reasons good and, well, not so good, it's time to see if its iconic electric guitars are equally as newsworthy...



If you're just getting back from a mission into deep space you might have missed the recent drama surrounding Gibson Brands, Inc. Here's the bullet points. Bankruptcy looms in 2018. New CEO James 'JC' Curleigh is appointed in November that year. The iconic brand is saved. It's all going well. Then, Director of Brand Experience Mark Agnesi releases his now infamous, and hastily-withdrawn, 'Play Authentic' video. Gibson sues Armadillo Distribution Enterprises, the owners of Dean and Luna Guitars. The guitar-playing community turns ugly. Gibson switches tack "from confrontation to collaboration".

Now, we all love a bit of gossip but the question rattling around in most of our noggins is surely, 'what about the guitars?'. Let's just say that Gibson hasn't always been on top of quality control in the past few years. Some stuff (remember the Firebird X?) has been downright weird. With 'JC' at the helm, will we get the Gibson guitars we deserve?

To get to the bottom of that enquiry, we've taken delivery of three models from the brand's 2019 Modern Collection: the Les Paul Tribute, Les Paul Special Tribute DC and the legendary SG Standard. First impressions are positive. Let's take a closer look...



SG STANDARD

Better the devil you know...



The SG Standard's rounded profile mahogany neck hits the sweet spot between shallow and deep

£1199



AT A GLANCE

BODY: Mahogany
NECK: Mahogany, set-in
SCALE: 628mm (24.75")
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood
FRETS: 22 medium jumbo
PICKUPS: Gibson 490T humbucker (bridge), Gibson 490R humbucker (neck)
CONTROLS: 2x volume, 2x tone, three-way pickup selector toggle switch
HARDWARE: Chrome aluminium Tune-O-Matic bridge, aluminium stop tailpiece, Grover Rotomatic tuners
LEFT-HANDED: N/A
FINISH: Ebony (as reviewed), Heritage Cherry
CONTACT: www.gibson-guitar.eu

You probably think that the Les Paul Standard is the biggest selling Gibson of all time... Well, you'd actually be wrong. The SG Standard has been kicking its older sibling's ass in finding good homes for decades. Of course, that iconic double-cutaway design was originally the replacement for the poorly-selling single-cut Les Paul. It was only officially renamed the SG in 1963.

The SG Standard we have in our possession nails the vibe of the 1964 model. That year, the SG was spec'd with a slightly chubbier neck than the super slim efforts of the previous three years. Don't, er, fret. We're not talking baseball bats here. The 'rounded' profile filling out our palm is still quite slim. It just happens to hit a sweet spot between shallow and deep that should please most players.

In classic SG style, the body and neck of this model are cut from

lightweight mahogany. This guitar weighs a mere 3kg (aka 6.10lb). The flawlessly applied nitrocellulose finish will age beautifully over the next few years. The hardware should keep its looks. Chrome is the Keanu Reeves of hardware finishes. Come back in a decade and it'll probably look exactly the same.

Playability is impressive. The rosewood fingerboard plays host to 22 beautifully-finished medium jumbo frets and a low action accommodated by the 305mm (12") radius. Upper fret access has always been great on the SG Standard. The deep 'devil horn' cutaways and shallow neck heel keep well out of your way.

Plugging in, the 490T and 490R 'Modern Classic' humbuckers deliver all the trademark warmth *and* bite we expect. The SG has more of a snarl than a Les Paul in the bridge position. Listen to SG fans like Paul Weller, Black Sabbath's Tony Iommi and, of course, Angus Young of AC/DC. Their tone is all about aggression, and punching your licks and riffs through a mix. That's what the SG Standard does best. Those guys would love this 2019 model.

With build quality, tone and playability of this high standard, the SG Standard is sure to be topping Gibson's sales figures for years to come.

THE 490T AND 490R HUMBUCKERS DELIVER ALL THE TRADEMARK WARMTH AND BITE WE EXPECT



Its maple neck helps give the Les Paul Tribute a punchy tone and excellent tuning stability

£999

LES PAUL TRIBUTE

Well, that's a load off...



AT A GLANCE

BODY: Mahogany/maple

NECK: Maple, set-in

SCALE: 628mm (24.75")

FINGERBOARD: Rosewood

FRETS: 22 medium jumbo

PICKUPS: Gibson 490T humbucker (bridge), Gibson 490R humbucker (neck)

CONTROLS: 2 x volume, 2 x tone, three-way pickup selector toggle switch

HARDWARE: Nickel aluminium Tune-O-Matic bridge, aluminium stop tailpiece, Vintage Deluxe tuners with Keystone buttons

LEFT-HANDED: N/A

FINISH: Satin Honeyburst (as reviewed), Satin Ice Tea, Satin Tobacco Burst, Satin Cherry Sunburst



Since around 1982, Gibson has been weight-relieving its Les Paul models. That decade saw a shift in guitar fashion to lightweight pointy stuff with Floyd Rose vibratos and lollipop thin necks. Before Gibson began this method of construction, it wasn't unusual to find Les Paul Standards and Customs tipping the scales at well over 4.5kg (10 pounds).

Why are we telling you this? Well, at 3.5kg (7.9lb) the 2019 Modern Collection Tribute model you see before you is probably the lightest Les Paul we've ever lifted.

The Tribute comes with what Gibson describe as "Ultra-Modern Weight Relief". This means that the mahogany back has a series of chambers cut into it before the guitar's maple cap is glued in place. The idea is you get a guitar that sounds like a classic Les Paul but won't feel like you're trying to shift heavy furniture.

Even played acoustically, we can hear that the Tribute has a hollow vibe. That airiness becomes even more apparent when you plug in. This guitar has the same 'Modern Classic' pups as the SG Standard. Here they sound less aggressive with a tonal warmth and roundness that's not a million miles away from a Gibson ES-335 semi. This guitar will rock however. If a love of Jimmy Page or Slash sent you here, you'll get off on the ballsy overdrive tones and long haul sustain.

Flicking the three-way pickup selector toggle switch, you'll discover that the neck 'bucker is perfect for bluesy noodling, if that happens to be

THE TRIBUTE IS PROBABLY THE LIGHTEST LES PAUL WE'VE EVER LIFTED

your bag. Bending the strings above the 12th fret is a joy thanks to the medium jumbo frets and 305mm (12") radius.

Like the Les Paul Special Tribute DC, this guitar deviates from the classic Gibson neck wood. Instead of the expected mahogany you'll find a piece of maple used here. This is likely an attempt to keep costs down but we actually like the substitution. Maple is super stiff and we're sure that contributes to the Les Paul Tribute's punchy tone and excellent tuning stability. It adds to the desirability of this sub-£1,000 beauty. Yes, it's lightweight but certainly not in features and tone.



LES PAUL SPECIAL TRIBUTE DC

This DC is a marvel...



AT A GLANCE

BODY: Mahogany

NECK: Maple, set-in

SCALE: 628mm (24.75")

FINGERBOARD: Rosewood

FRETS: 22 medium jumbo

PICKUPS: 2 x Gibson P-90

CONTROLS: 1 x volume, 1 x tone, three-way pickup selector toggle switch

HARDWARE: Chrome compensated Wraparound bridge/tailpiece, Vintage Deluxe tuners with white buttons

LEFT-HANDED: N/A

FINISH: Worn Cherry (as reviewed), Worn Ebony, Worn Brown, Blue Stain

Like the other two guitars here, the Les Paul Special Tribute DC is based on a classic from Gibson's illustrious back catalogue. The Special was originally launched in 1955 as a single-cut budget guitar for novices and the skint. By 1958, it was rebooted as a double-cutaway with a slab mahogany body and a pair of P-90 single-coil pickups.

Our 2019 Special is based around those late 1950s guitars. The wraparound bridge/tailpiece is pure vintage cool, as are the white button vintage tuners. The body is true to type, cut from a slab of mahogany. Original Specials and the various vintage reissues currently offered by Gibson have mahogany necks. Our Tribute however, is packing a length of maple topped with a 305mm (12") radius rosewood 'board. In common with the other guitars here, the quality of finish on the fingerboard and frets is



The Special features a mahogany body and a pair of classic Gibson P-90 single-coil pickups

excellent. Someone gave this guy a great start in life.

Weight-wise, the Tribute DC comes in at 3.4kg (7.5lb), slap bang between the SG Standard and the Les Paul Tribute. It practically defies gravity on a strap and won't cause you shoulder fatigue at gigs or during any long rehearsal sessions.

The pickups are classic Gibson P-90 single-coils. Now, as any tone aficionado will love to tell you, something magical happens when you combine P-90s with a mahogany body and a Gibson scale length. As proven by our Tribute DC, you get oodles of sustain, a warm, woody tone on clean settings, and a blast of rock 'n' roll

attitude when you kick on some overdrive. It's kind of like a fat Telecaster thing. If you haven't plugged a Special into a cranked amp and whacked an open A chord and revelled in its majesty, well, you know the rest.

Considering its £869 asking price, the DC offers a lot of cool for your money. We like the robust Worn Cherry finish that shows the grain of the mahogany body. Hell, we're even smitten by the three-ply scratchplate. Most of all we love the fact that you can get a real US Gibson for well under a grand that doesn't feel like a compromise. It feels, well, Special...

YOU GET A WARM, WOODY TONE ON CLEAN SETTINGS, AND A BLAST OF ROCK 'N' ROLL ATTITUDE WITH SOME OVERDRIVE

FINAL VERDICT

Is it back to business with a bang for the iconic brand?

If some of you are still miffed at Gibson following recent events, it would be foolish to take it out on the guitars. Gibsons are iconic for a good reason and, well, just look at them! We came.

We saw... We strummed. We're happy to report that the build quality, playability, spec sheets, not to mention the reasonable price tags, are all at the level where Gibson need to be.

There's a lesson here. If you want to lure us away from the competition, to make us "play authentic", drop the videos and concentrate on building guitars that we can't resist.

SG STANDARD



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

LES PAUL TRIBUTE



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

LES PAUL SPECIAL TRIBUTE DC



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