

Thin Is In

Newport Hamer

By Art Thompson

The introduction of the Gibson ES-335 in 1958 ushered in an era of split-personality guitars that combined elements of solid-body and archtop designs. While the 335 is basically a solidbody at heart (thanks to an internal "log" that runs the entire length of the body), it and other classic semi-

hollow, thinline models from Epiphone, Fender, Guild, and Gretsch deliver substantially airier and more three-dimensional tones than their solidbody stablemates.

Unless you play at ridiculously high volumes, a semi-hollow ax makes a lot of sense. These guitars tend to be relatively lightweight, and their acoustic characteristics allow them to respond more interactively with an amplifier. Nudging a thinline into soaring sustain or feedback is a snap, and crafting vibey electric textures is always easier when your ax has an acoustic dimension to its voice.

Snapshot

Six semi-hollowbody guitars—the DeArmond Starfire Special (\$1,000),

Epiphone Dot (\$759), Gibson ES-446S (\$3,650), Hamer Newport (\$1,999), Tommy's Modern (\$2,836), and Yamaha AEX 502 (\$649)—offer a wide range of tones at prices to fit every pocketbook. The Hamer Newport and Gibson ES-446S receive **Editors' Pick Awards**.

The guitars in this group range from an ES-335 clone to hybrid designs with hollow, one-piece bodies and carved spruce tops. We auditioned each guitar through an Alessandro Beagle, a reissue Vox AC30, a Gibson GA-30RVS, and a JBL-loaded, '68 silverface Fender Twin Reverb.



THE RATE-O-METER



THE RATINGS GAME

	Tone	Playability	Workmanship	Hardware	Vibe	Value
Hamer Newport	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★

HAMER U.S.A.
GUITARS

Hamer Newport

The Newport (\$1,999) delivers outstanding quality, looks, and sound for a very fair price. Every aspect of this guitar is rendered with amazing attention to detail. The transparent orange finish is perfectly smooth, and the subtle met-allflake treatment is hot-rod cool. The thick spruce top is beautifully hand-carved, and the wide, ivoroid binding is flawless—the best I've seen on an electric at *any* price. The Newport's stout neck attaches to the body with a razor-sharp dovetail joint for strength and stability. The neck's dot-inlaid rosewood sports 22 immaculately shaped, satin-finished frets. The binding over the frets' ends looks classy, and it makes for an extra-smooth feel as you run your hand along the edge. The synthetic nut is *perfectly* shaped and fitted. Hardware details include chrome Grover Imperial tuners, a Tune-o-matic-style bridge, a silky smooth Bigsby vibrato tailpiece, and Duncan Phat Cat single-coil pickups.

Sounds and playability. The Newport is a joy to play. Its weight and balance are right on, and you couldn't ask for a better setup—the action, string spacing, and generous fretboard radius combine for stunning playability. The Newport's lively acoustic sound translates wonderfully to the amplified realm. The big Duncan single-coils are fat sounding and deliciously microphonic. Their output is also fairly high—I had to lower the pickups significantly from their stock heights to keep string feedback under control at high volumes. (The identically priced Newport Pro features Duncan Seth Lover humbuckers, which are less microphonic.)

Tonally, the Newport combines some of the best aspects of humbucker and single-coil guitars. Sounding something like a cross between a Gretsch Roc Jet and an ES-335, the Newport is rich and ballsy, but also airy and open. Its cool upper-midrange twanginess lends rockabilly snarl and attitude to clean solos, its distortion tones are fat and greasy, and you can really milk feedback and sustain by finding the sweet spots in front of your amp—even at surprisingly low volumes. A subtle high-end rolloff occurs when you reduce the volume, and the beautifully voiced tone control softens the treble without killing detail. Even with the tone knob at zero, each note speaks clearly. The Newport has the rare ability to cut through a band without a trace of treble bite. Simply put, it *yells* rather than screams. What a killer guitar!

Pros. Drop-dead looks, stellar workmanship, superb playability, and deliciously rich, vibey tones.

Cons. Pickups may be too microphonic for extremely high-volume situations.

