

Man On The Moons

The long-anticipated PRS SE DGT – the David Grissom Tremolo – finally lands in the UK. But just how does this dramatically more affordable SE version stack up to the classic Core model?

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PRS SE DGT £979

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What You Need To Know

1 Another signature guitar from an artist we've never heard of?

Well, Texas-based David Grissom has played with an A-list of artists over the years, including Buddy Guy, John Mellencamp, The Allman Brothers Band, Chris Isaak, Robben Ford and John Mayall. He's been a PRS player since 1985 (the first year of the company's production), and along with being the primary driver behind what was to become the PRS McCarty Model in 1994, David has had his own signature guitar since 2007. He also has a signature PRS amp, the DG Custom 30.

2 It looks like a PRS Custom with an extra knob...

The now-classic double-cutaway PRS outline has been used since 1985 on the majority of the brand's models, including the Custom. This SE DGT mirrors the USA Core model in many ways with its unique neck shape, bigger frets, an extra volume control and DGT 'S' pickups.

3 Tell us about those moon inlays.

Back in the day these were the standard inlays used on PRS guitars; the fabled bird inlays were an up-charge option. Today, along with this new Gold Top SE, the only other PRS model that offers moon inlays as standard is the Core DGT.

Early in 2022, PRS let slip that its teams were working on an SE version of the long-running David Grissom Tremolo (DGT). He might not have the A-list profile of the likes of John Mayer, but if you're in the PRS 'family', David Grissom is a very important person. His input into the McCarty Model – appearing in 1994 as the first more vintage-aimed PRS guitar – is well documented and was, of course, the basis for his own signature model. Before his name was applied to the headstock, it was going to be called the 'McCarty II'. That guitar was launched in 2007 at the Austin Summer NAMM Show and was followed by an all-mahogany Standard version in 2012.

A decade on and while little seems to have changed, the DGT has been constantly tweaked in terms of finish, upgraded parts and pickups – like every continuing PRS model – and most recently PRS's TCI process. Plugging in a 2021 Core-level DGT, it's quite the old friend and we're reminded of just why the model has been a cornerstone of PRS over the past 15 years. In today's range the DGT is basically a McCarty (with its slightly thicker body and 22 frets) but with some tweaks. Most obviously, we have the PRS vibrato and an extra control knob, allowing individual pickup volumes and a master tone instead of the McCarty's master volume and tone.





The neck shape is unique, too, and we also get bigger fretwire, as used by PRS on the Core Santana Retro. The DGT's covered humbuckers can be coil-split simultaneously by the pull switch on the tone control (see Under The Hood over the page) and are unique to the PRS line.

The build quality and finishing remain a benchmark for our industry, the weight is perfect at 3.35kg (7.37lb), the feel and playability are outstanding, and the sounds, well, if you can't cover any rootsy classic rock with these humbuckers, not to mention the hugely musical split-coils, you need to get practising. We're supposed to be writing about the new SE version and we just can't stop playing this superb Core guitar. It might cost £4k, but the DGT is game-changing. So just how much of this exceptional journeyman vibe can PRS retain with its SE DGT model, which clocks in at quarter of the price?

Quite a lot, it turns out. When our early production prototype sample eventually arrives after shipping delays caused by strikes and snow, it's more than performance-ready. While we detail the specific differences with the USA-made model later on in this feature, the SE DGT comes in a Gold Top finish with moon inlays or in McCarty Tobacco Burst with birds, and it somehow appears – and, to a certain extent, feels – slightly more contemporary compared with the 'it could be vintage' vibe of the USA model. The top carve, now called 'shallow violin', is less contoured and there's none of the dished 'dimple' carving under the controls.

Of course, the hardware, pickups and electronics aren't of the same level as the USA guitar, but there's very little lacking in terms of function. We don't get locking tuners here (although drop-in locking replacements are available from PRS) and

1. The DGT is the only guitar in the current PRS line-up that uses individual pickup volumes and a master tone that also has a pull-switch to voice the partial coil-splits. The control nearest to the bridge is the volume control for the bridge pickup

2. Closely based on the USA pickups, the DGT's humbuckers are made in Indonesia. They're now commonplace in the PRS range, and we can thank David Grissom for introducing the pickup covers that first appeared on the production McCarty Model in 1994

The crescent shape of the control layout means that making subtle adjustments is fast and nuanced

UNDER THE HOOD

What's inside the SE DGT?

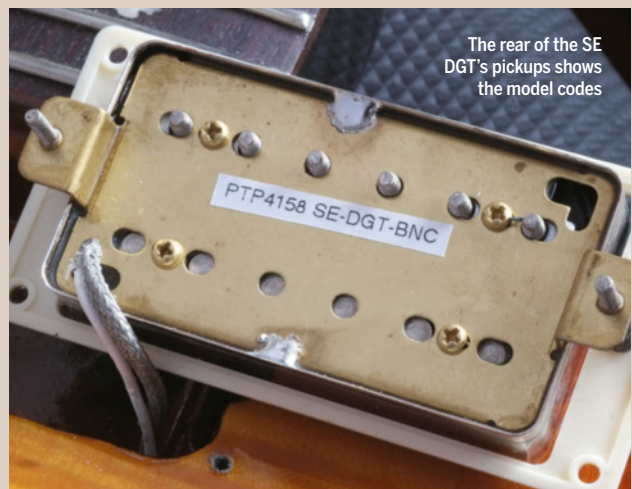
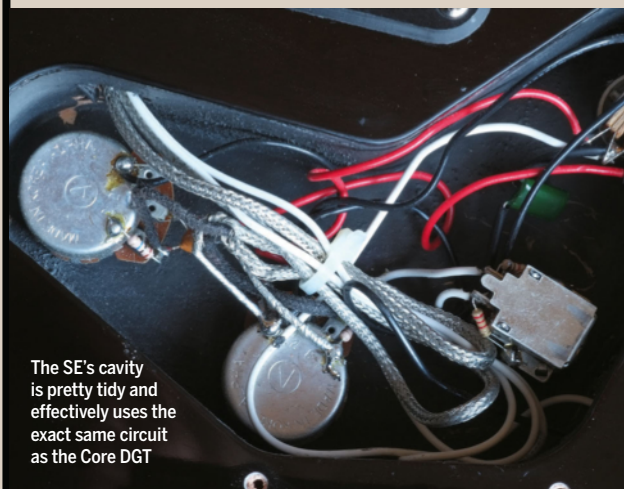
We might get more affordable components here compared with the USA Core model, but the actual circuit and component values appear identical. Our SE uses Alpha 'Made in Korea' stamped pots that we're presuming are 500k, and like the Core model the pull-switch tone control is a mini-pot. The same value resistors are used for the partial splits (2.2kohms on the bridge, 1.1k on the neck: standard PRS values), and it's the inner slug coils that are

primarily voiced and when both are on they are hum-cancelling.

The tone cap might be a generic green mylar type that you see on so many Eastern Asian guitars, but it's the same 223J code meaning .022µF. Like the Core model, we have the same value treble bleed capacitors (180pf) on each volume and the same 'tuning' resistors wired in parallel, from the input lug to ground, on each volume pot and valued at 10meg-ohms. This would mean that if the pot has a nominal

value of 500k with the added parallel resistor, then the pickup 'sees' 476k.

As ever, PRS doesn't divulge what's under the covers of any of its pickups. These DGT 'S' humbuckers have been designed in the USA but made in Indonesia by PSE, Cor-Tek's pickup making division: the bridge is labelled PTP4159 SE-DGT-TNU and the neck (pictured) is PTP4158 SE-DGT-BNC. In both their DCR readings and what we hear, think medium-hot PAF at the bridge and classic PAF at the neck.



3. Back in the day these moon inlays were the standard inlays on PRS guitars and the famous birds were optional. Today, the DGT is the only guitar in the range that still features them. By design, the angle of the crescent moon matches the top curve of the headstock

4. This 'moulded' vibrato is a close cousin of the one used on the Core USA guitars and it brings its own character to the sound compared with PRS's wrapover bridge. The arm is a push-fit and tension-adjustable

the 'moulded' (we'd call it cast) vibrato is deemed good enough to appear on the USA S2 Custom and Standard and the CE 24 models – the semi-hollow version of which currently lists at £2,750. The plastic parts, pickup rings and knobs are more generic than the USA guitar, but, again, these differences have nothing to do with function.

Feel & Sounds

As we illustrate in our SE versus Core comparison after this review, there are minor differences to the neck shape and fretwire, but you may well prefer the less costly date, as we found with the SE version of the USA Silver Sky (in issue 482). There's certainly nothing wrong here. The SE neck does feel marginally bigger, but in the hand it retains the pretty round feel of the USA model with that hint of a 'V' in the lower positions. The frets are slightly wider and a smidge less high, and one difference is the rosewood binding that hides the fret tangs on the SE, although both pieces are noticeably lighter in colour.

Unlike the USA model that ships with 0.011-gauge strings, the SE ships with 0.010 to 0.046 and four instead of five vibrato





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springs. We're tempted to fit some heavier strings, but the SE's string choice may well have greater appeal. Like the Core model, the SE DGT uses the original PRS scale length of 635mm (25 inches) and this 'halfway between Fender and Gibson' duality is so key to this guitar.

Unplugged, this SE sounds lively and vibrant but certainly not overbright, and when plugged in and in bridge humbucking mode it's big and beefy; what you hear is pretty single-cut-like, not least with a crisp and cookin' Marshall-y voice. There are no sharp edges to be found here – it's almost slightly cocked wah with highs that are rounded but clear, and mids that kick but don't sound over-egged or honky. It's a really creamy voice. The switch through both-on to neck is beautifully graduated, too, and at the neck you're hearing the sort of voice you'd associate with a single-cut Les Paul-style guitar. But pull back those volume controls – even slight rises or dips on these volumes seem almost touch-sensitive – and more subtlety emerges with a cleaner and clearer tone, almost Rickenbacker-meets-Gretsch. And there are some pretty cool rhythm sounds here that love a little waggle from the vibrato.

The scale length's 'halfway between Fender and Gibson' duality is so key to this guitar

Quite often on a humbucker guitar, switching to the single-coil-splits ruins the fun, but we're tempted to argue that's where it starts here. Yes, you lose a little output as you'd expect, but it's far from night and day. The lows and mids sit back and the smother highs of the humbucker mode are replaced with single-coil sparkle and snap. It's Fender-y, a little Tele-like at the bridge (especially when played clean), there's some Strat-y chop at the neck, and with both pickups on things get a little Gretsch-y again. But whatever your ears are telling you, what you hear are very musical, usable single-coil textures that cover considerable ground from funk to indie jangle – particularly with both pickups on and using those dual volumes. When you run the guitar in single-coil mode and kick in an outboard boost with a little tone control roll-off, you're in

THE RIVALS

The current PRS SE range is pretty expansive so the new SE DGT has in-house competition. But it's the only three-control model in the SE range and there's only one other current double-cut 22-fret guitar with vibrato, the SE Custom 22 Semi-Hollow (£979), aside from the bolt-on SE Silver Sky. There's also the 22-fret single-cut SE Tremonti Standard with vibrato and independent volume and tone controls, though this one has no coil-splits.

Among PRS's other launches for 2023 is the vintage-aimed 22-fret SE McCarty 594 (in both double- and single-cut shapes) with its shorter scale length, two-piece bridge and tailpiece, and 58/15 LT 'S' lower-output 'buckers (£TBA).

If you don't mind a 24-fret guitar then the all-mahogany SE Standard 24-08 (£675) and maple-topped Custom 24-08 (£1,0149) come highly recommended, not least that each humbucker can be switched independently to 'true single coil' mode.



The classic PRS headstock holds pretty standard non-locking tuners and the unique blend synthetic nut. As ever, under the DGT cover is the adjustment for the two-way truss rod



PRS SE DGT

PRICE: £979 (inc gigbag)

ORIGIN: Indonesia

TYPE: Double-cutaway, carved-top solidbody electric

BODY: Mahogany with 'shallow violin' carve maple top (w/ flame maple veneer on sunburst model)

NECK: Mahogany, DGT profile, glued-in

SCALE LENGTH: 635mm (25")

NUT/WIDTH: Synthetic/42.9mm

FINGERBOARD: Rosewood, 'moon' inlays, 254mm (10") radius

FRETS: 22, jumbo

HARDWARE: PRS Patented vibrato (cast), PRS designed enclosed tuners – nickel-plated

STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 52.5mm

ELECTRICS: PRS DGT 'S' Treble and Bass covered humbuckers, 3-way toggle pickup selector switch, individual volume controls and master tone with simultaneous coil-split pull-switch

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.51/7.72

OPTIONS: Bird inlays on McCarty Tobacco Sunburst finish

RANGE OPTIONS: See Rivals

LEFT-HANDERS: No

FINISHES: Gold Top (as reviewed), McCarty Tobacco Burst – all high gloss

that slightly honky 'Tele meets older Les Paul' land. A pretty nice place to be.

One thing, of course, is that the two volumes are reversed from many three-control setups, so the volume knob closest to the bridge pickup is for the bridge, not the neck pickup. But the crescent shape of the control layout means that the controls and pickup switch sit right under your right hand, making subtle adjustments fast and nuanced. There's nothing stopping you from leaving everything full up, of course, but there's just so much more to the sound potential if you use them.

Verdict

After reviewing the most recent SE models such as Paul's Guitar, the Silver Sky and both the Custom and Standard 24-08s, we weren't expecting anything but a stellar performance from this SE DGT – and that's what we get. Is it a facsimile of the USA model at a quarter of the price? No. How can it be? But the SE makes a pretty good stab at emulating the Core version, especially when it comes to the all-important and versatile sounds, and that

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means we have a very valid musical tool for anyone needing to cover a lot of ground. It's also a very in-tune and stable guitar, as you'd expect from PRS.

We're only offered two colours and the Gold Top with those moon inlays is certainly an antidote to the posher flame maple and birds aesthetic of the McCarty Tobacco Burst. It would be nice to see a classic black finish in the future, and how about a Sea Foam Green that'd take us back to where this story all started with David Grissom's '85 PRS?

But whatever the history, or its future, this is a damn fine working guitar that covers pretty much all of the classic genres with the flick or pull of a switch and the twist of a control knob. **G**

Guitarist CHOICE 9/10

PROS Detailed build; creamy humbucker voices; excellent single-coil sounds; good weight; stable in-tune vibrato: everything!

CONS Some parts of the guitar are rather generic but remain perfectly functional