

FIRST PLAY



**GRETSCH PROFESSIONAL
SERIES HOLLOW BODY
TENNESSEAN**
£2,399

WHAT IS IT? Professional
Collection model with Pro-FT
Filter'Tron pickups, String-Thru
Bigsby vibrato and Gotoh
locking tuners

Tennessee Honey

The working musician's hollowbody designed to handle most popular styles but retaining that unmistakably cool Gretsch vibe

Words Neville Marten **Photography** Olly Curtis

Debuting in 1958, the 6119 Tennesseean was the least fancy of the four Chet Atkins models available from Gretsch. Eschewing the Western bling of the other instruments – including the 6120 beloved of Eddie Cochran, the 6122 Country Gentleman favoured by Atkins himself, and the Les Paul-sized 6121 chambered ‘solidbody’ Round-Up – it featured just one Filter'Tron humbucker at the bridge and was played most notably by The Beatles' George Harrison, albeit in later form.

Although nominally a 406mm (16-inch) wide single-cutaway hollowbody, the Tennesseean's depth wavered during its first few years until settling on the 64mm (2.5-inch) we see today. However, the most notable change came when Gretsch added a neck pickup, significantly enhancing the guitar's versatility. The Tennesseean's colour choice of Deep Cherry Stain or Walnut further separated it from the other Chet Atkins models, which usually came in the more familiar Gretsch orange. Harrison's was a 1963 model in red with dual Filter'Tron pickups.







1. Not only does the Gretsch logo'd Bigsby tailpiece impart that classic shimmering vibrato, it's so much a part of the look. Here, stringing is made easier by the String-Thru roller bar

2. Although Gretsch has plenty of original bridge designs in its history, this Adjusto-Matic isn't one of them. It sits on the wooden 'foot' that's pinned in place to stop it moving

3. These Pro-FT Filter'Trons employ an Alnico II magnet at the neck and Alnico V for the bridge pickup. Typically, the control circuit uses a master volume (pictured) with individual pickup volume controls and a master tone

Shift forward six decades and the Tennessean is back. Looking much like its Brooklyn-built forbear – with arched laminated maple body, bound all-round in white, a two-piece maple neck with dark centre stripe and white heel cap, a bound rosewood fingerboard, bound f-holes and twin Filter'Tron pickups – the Japanese-made model, however, aims to bring a more modern edge to this journeyman guitar. Hence on the B6CP Bigsby vibrato the strings feed through a hole in the rocker bar, rather than having to awkwardly locate the ball-end onto a steel peg. The top's 'trestle' bracing has been updated to Gretsch's new Arc-Tone system that company literature describes as "torrefied maple tone bars with arc-shaped spruce support braces located underneath the bridge area". Said to promise "enhanced sustain, crisp note attack and excellent feedback control", it should allow the Tennessean to handle powerful overdrive without the inherent issues associated with all-hollow instruments.

Other nods to the modern age include Gotoh locking tuners to aid tuning stability, Grover straplocks, and an Adjusto-Matic bridge that's perched atop a pinned rosewood foot.

The Tennessean's U-shaped neck carries a 305mm (12-inch) radius bound rosewood fingerboard with 22 medium jumbo frets. The 'board's edges have been rolled for playing comfort, while the beautifully profiled frets invite eager hands to play. Nickel hardware with grey pickguard and pickup rings work well against the flawless Deep Cherry gloss, the whole thing looks crisp and smart and, as we'd expect from Japan, expertly put together.

4. Reflecting its workingman style, there's no model name or decoration on this austere headstock face, unlike the horseshoe inlay on the Nashville and the more flamboyant design of the Falcon



Feel & Sounds

Although Gretsch describes the Tennessean's neck as Standard U shape, it feels like a regular C profile with a depth of 20mm at the 1st fret and 23mm by the 10th before it fattens into the heel. It's very comfy and not tiring to play over long stints. Indeed, so well are the fingerboard edges rolled and the frets so expertly finished that it's a pleasure to simply sit and noodle. And with its classic radius, slightly shorter-than-usual 625mm (24.6-inch) scale length and medium jumbo frets, it welcomes all manner of fretboard antics, with bends and vibrato beautifully served on the 11-gauge strings. Like Gibson's ES-330 (reviewed in issue 519), ultra high-end forays are off the agenda, but blues-rock soloing at the 12th position is perfectly doable. And although said Gibbo is lighter than our Gretsch due to the latter's deeper body and significant metalware, it's still an easy instrument to wield on a strap.

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Electrics-wise, today's Tennessean is a simpler beast than the model of times past, with a master volume mounted on the cutaway's horn, individual pickup volumes, master tone, and three-way pickup selector. It's quite intuitive, and through our test rig of a Mark I Reissue Boogie combo, plus Hudson Broadcast, Lovepedal Hermida Zendrive, Providence chorus and Echoplex delay pedals, it delivers a wonderful array of tones. With the bridge pickup set clean and a dash of almost slap-back echo, we're treated to a glistening, musical tone. Bright and chiming, it's perfect for rock 'n' roll lead, fingerpicked chords and clean riffs.

Similarly, the neck Filter'Tron – both on its own and in tandem with the bridge – oozes warmth, clarity and class. You can see why the rockabilly players loved it. But in the hands of a total musician like Chet Atkins, the sonic landscape is all but boundless.

Players such as Neil Young, Stephen Stills and, of course, the great Malcolm Young have made wonderful distorted noises on Gretsch guitars. And stepping on the Zendrive and off the Echoplex, leaving only a dribble of Boogie reverb, we're treated to the kind of tones a





Along with that String-Thru Bigsby, the rear-lock Gotoh tuners make restringing very easy and help keep tuning stable. Other modern details include the glow-in-the-dark Luminlay side dots and Graph Tech Tusq XL nut



GRETSCH PROFESSIONAL SERIES HOLLOW BODY TENNESSEAN

PRICE: £2,399 (inc case)

ORIGIN: Japan

TYPE: Single-cutaway hollow body electric

BODY: 'Tennessee Rose' shape, laminated maple with Arc-Tone bracing and bound f-holes

NECK: Maple with standard U-shape profile

SCALE LENGTH: 625mm (24.6")

NUT/WIDTH: Graph Tech Tusq XL/42.86 mm

FINGERBOARD: Rosewood, white bound, with neo-classical thumbnail markers

FRETS: 22, medium jumbo

HARDWARE: Gretsch-branded B6CP String-Thru Bigsby, Gotoh locking tuners, G arrow knobs, Grover strap locks, all nickel plated; grey plexi pickguard, grey pickup rings

STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 51.5mm

ELECTRICS: 2x Gretsch Pro-FT Filter'Tron humbucking pickups, 3-way pickup selector, master volume control, volumes for each pickup, master tone

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.175/7

RANGE OPTIONS: Hollow Body Falcon (£3,549) with larger body, in White and Cerulean Smoke with gold sparkle binding, or Black with silver sparkle binding; and the Hollow Body Nashville (£2,799), with finishes including Orange Stain, Cadillac Green and Midnight Sapphire, each featuring a gold plexi pickguard and gold hardware

LEFT-HANDERS: No

FINISH: Deep Cherry Stain (as reviewed), Havana Burst, Walnut Stain

Fender Musical Instruments EMEA

01342 331700

www.gretschguitars.com



9/10

PROS Beautifully built, with sensible modern twists, a great-feeling neck and an inspiring range of wonderful tones

CONS Some players might rue the lack of upper-fret access here

Gibson doesn't quite do. On the bridge, it's strident, articulate and almost sweet, while flipping to the neck things become warm and, yes, the old clichés 'woody and flutey', somewhere between Les Paul light and Strat heavy. With both pickups on things become thinner, a tad more vowelly and definitely funkier.

Ray Butts' Filter'Tron is a markedly different animal from Seth Love's humbucker. Is it clearer? More focused? Sharper? Possibly all three, but we'd hesitate to say better.

Verdict

It's great to see the return of guitars like the Gibson ES-330 and this delightful Gretsch Tennessee. A simpler offering than many guitars in the stable on its release, the model found favour with players who loved 'that great Gretsch tone' but were less enamoured by cowboys, cacti and steer horns, simply wanting a purposeful guitar that looked fabulous, played well and sounded right.

The Tennessee of 2024 is an altogether less idiosyncratic, more intuitive but

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still distinctly handsome machine. That it's beautifully built, plays and feels like a much more modern proposition, and supplies all manner of brilliant sounds from shimmering cleans to snarling driven tones is testament to the work that Gretsch has put in. But let's also doff our caps to the old guard: designer Jimmie Webster, pickup guru Ray Butts and, of course, inspirational genius Chet Atkins.

If Gretsch guitars have passed you by, nip down to your local guitar store and audition a Tennessee through a good amp with a decent pedal or two. You may just be converted. And since it's likely to street for not much over the two grand mark, you'll be getting some serious bang for your buck, too. **G**