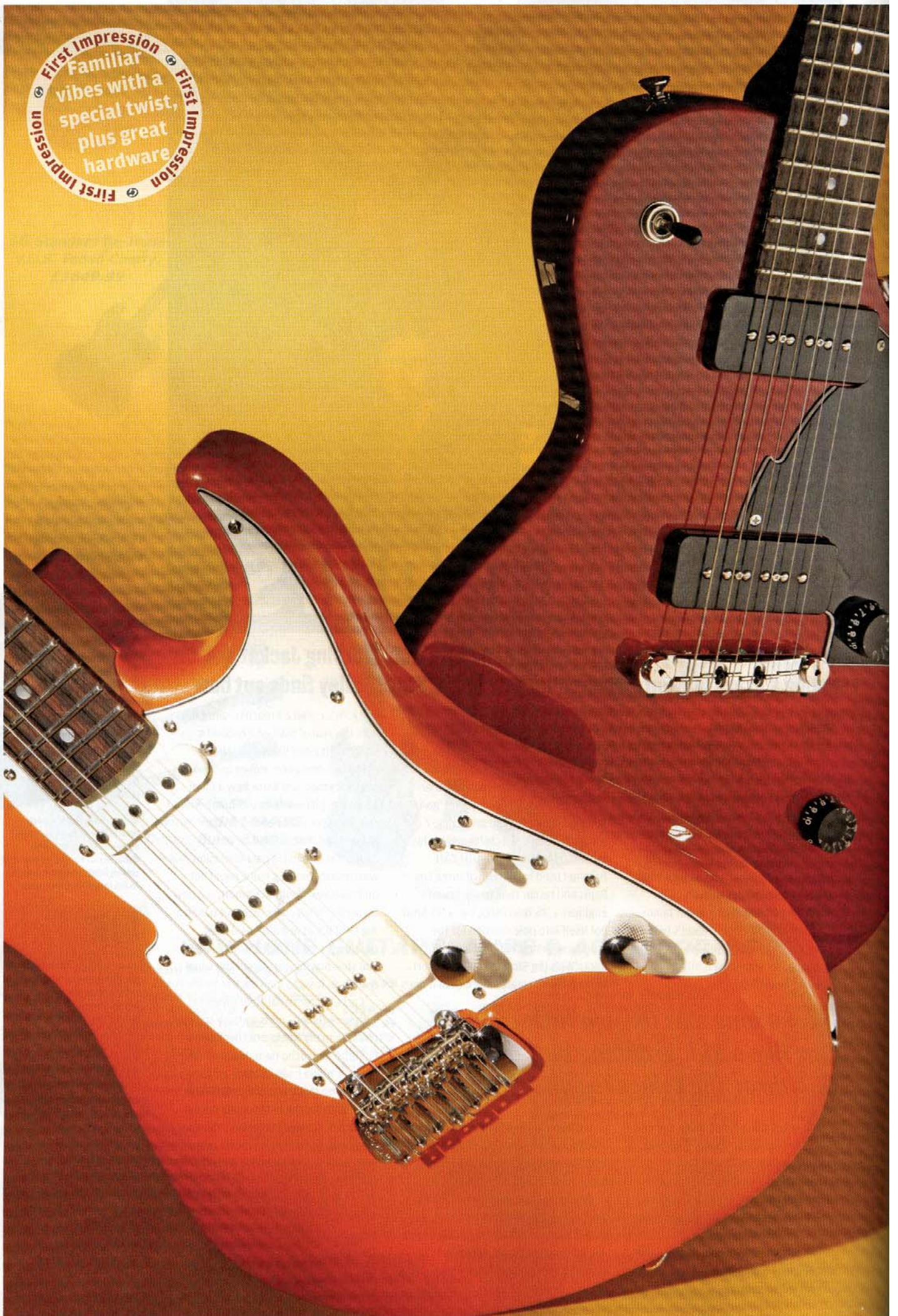


First Impression  
Familiar  
vibes with a  
special twist,  
plus great  
hardware  
First Impression



Price: £729



Whether your goal is twang or raunch, Fret-King's new Blue Label guitars come with great hardware and brilliant pickups as standard. Huw Price discovers a potential market leader

# Fret-King

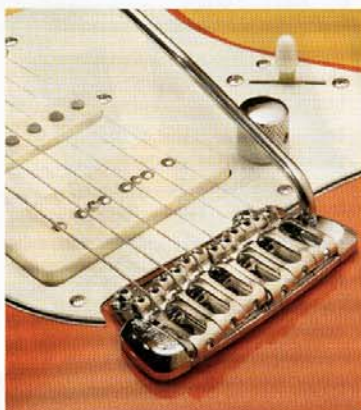
## Super 60 SP & Eclat 2

The eleven-strong range of affordable Fret-King Blue Label guitars and basses is produced in the Far East in a low-volume, luthier-built environment. They're made with the same quality imported tonewoods associated with all Fret-King guitars, plus custom-wound Fret-King pickups and circuitry, and premium hardware.

On the surface, the two guitars up for review this month borrow from pretty well-known sources: Hank Marvin wouldn't twitch at the sight of the Super 60 SP, while Bob Marley or John Lennon wouldn't have turned a hair at the Eclat 2. So yes, we've seen these shapes before – but the man behind them is the UK's foremost guitar and hardware designer Trevor Wilkinson. Although Wilkinson has dreamt up hardware and body shapes for countless manufacturers, the two Fret-King ranges – the offshore Blue Labels and the fully UK-built Green Labels – are very much all his own. Most importantly, this guy doesn't mess about with classic designs for the sake of it... there's always a reason. His aim is to build practical working guitars liberated from what he calls 'nostalgic and outmoded design criteria set many decades ago'.

### SUPER 60 SP

This guitar seems to borrow from so many sources that it ends up having a style all its own, though it probably has more in common with G&L's Legacy models than anything with the 'F' word on the headstock. Under the slightly metallic orange finish there's a centre-jointed American alder body, which is bolted to a Canadian hard rock maple neck with a 22-fret Indian rosewood fingerboard. The shaft heights of the



The Wilkinson VS401V vibrato bridge comes with cool bent-steel saddles and an adjustable-tension push-in arm



No messing with tradition here: alder body, bolt-on maple neck, rosewood fingerboard. There's no maple option

**The P90 is a great success. It's powerful, fat and aggressive, and combines with the middle pickup to give a beefy quack**

string-locking Gotoh tuners are graded to achieve a proper angle over the nut – so with no string trees, two friction areas have been removed. The VS401V vibrato is a twin-pivot hardened steel unit with a stagger-drilled steel block. The VSV-style bent steel saddles are claimed to provide superior tone and intonation, and there's a lockable push-in arm with adjustable tension. Tuning stability is helped by a slippery Wilkaloit nut.

The Super 60 comes in three pickup configurations: SSS, HSS and the P90SS SP model we're reviewing here. It's an uncommon arrangement, but Ry Cooder played a Strat with this layout for years until he discovered the Valco/Oahu lap steel pickup. There's a five-way switch and knurled metal master volume and

tone knobs; the volume is conveniently located for swell techniques, but it's taller than a regular S-type plastic knob and some players might find it gets in the way.

The sleek satin-finished neck is a pleasantly grippy handful, and the low and fast action make this an effortlessly playable guitar that stays in tune. ➤

### FINAL SCORE

Build Quality .....	18/20
Playability .....	18/20
Sound .....	17/20
Value for money .....	16/20
Vibe .....	15/20
<b>TOTAL .....</b>	<b>84%</b>
Good for... S-type tones, rock, blues, slide	
Look elsewhere... for death metal duties	

### FACTFILE

#### SUPER 60 SP

**Description:** Solid body electric guitar. Made in Korea.

**Price:** £729

**Build:** Alder body with bolt-on maple neck, 22 fret rosewood fingerboard, Gotoh tuners

**Electrics:** Two S-type single coil pickups and one P90, five-way switch, master volume and tone controls

**Left-hander:** Not yet

**Finish:** Electric orange metallic, ice white, original vintage burst

**Scale Length:** 25.5"/650mm

**Neck width:**  
Nut 41mm  
12th fret 51mm

**Depth of neck:**  
First fret 19mm  
12th fret 21mm

**String spacing:**  
Nut 34.5mm  
Bridge 53mm

**Action as supplied:**  
12th fret treble 2.5mm  
12th fret bass 3.5mm

**Weight:** 4kg/8.8lb

### THE COMPETITION

#### G&L TRIBUTE LEGACY HB

Very decent import version of the S-style Legacy model, with an Alnico humbucker at the bridge, two single-coils and G&L's fine Dual Fulcrum vibrato  
RRP: £515

#### FENDER HIGHWAY 1 STRAT HSS

A '70s type big-headstock Stratocaster with a beefy Atomic humbucker at the bridge, two hot single coils, a vintage vibrato and the Greasebucket tone circuit  
RRP: £575

Price: £499

**FACT FILE**

**ECLAT 2**

**Description:** Solid body electric guitar. Made in Korea

**Price:** £499

**Build:** Mahogany body with set mahogany neck, 22-fret rosewood fingerboard, vintage style tuners

**Electrics:** Two Wilkinson P90-style single coil pickups, three-way switch, master volume and tone controls

**Left-hander:** Not yet

**Finish:** Cherry red, yellow mahogany

**Scale Length:** 25"/634mm

**Neck width:**

Nut 42mm

12th fret 51mm

**Depth of neck:**

First fret 19mm

12th fret 20mm

**String spacing:**

Nut 34.5mm

Bridge 53mm

**Action as supplied:**

12th fret treble 2.5mm

12th fret bass 3.5mm

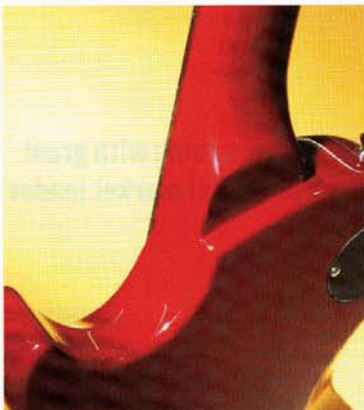
**Weight:** 4kg/8.8lb

**Contact:** JHS

01132 865381

www.jhs.co.uk

**The pickups do justice to the Eclat's deep, resonant tone. This guitar can do rock, slide, blues, rockabilly and even bebop**



Mahogany body and mahogany neck, with a glued neck joint and a cutaway chamfer for better upper fret access



Wilkinson's latest wrapover bridge has two lockable sliding centre sections for fine-setting the intonation

**SOUNDS**

The Super 60's neck and middle pickups are pure S-type. They're not over-wound, so the tone is bright and glassy and surprisingly big and bold. Loads of players consider S-type bridge pickups a bit of a weak link, so swapping them out is a reasonable option - and this P90 is a great success. It's fat, powerful and aggressive, but it still has plenty of wiry bite and it doesn't overpower the other two. It has a raucous honk that loves overdrive, and it combines superbly with the middle pickup for a beefy quack that two regular S-type pickups couldn't deliver - and if you still want single-coil tones, 60 percent of them are there.

**ECLAT 2**

This guitar's main influence is Gibson's Les Paul Special of the 1950s. Similarities include a pair of P90s and a two-piece single-cut body and a glued-in one-piece neck, both of mahogany. It's no straight copy, though. Care has been taken to improve upper fret access with a PRS-style chamfer in the cutaway, and the area under the strumming arm has a 'unique forearm chamfer' - a tapering concave rout, almost like a channel for the forearm to rest in.

As well as that, the bridge isn't quite what it seems. Many builders and players believe that guitars with wrapover bridges sound better than guitars with tun-o-matics, but the downside is that you can't set the intonation accurately. Wilkinson's ingenious solution involves two movable sections for the A and D strings and the G and B strings. The high and low E strings are intonated using two

small grub screws that push against the bridge posts, and the centre sections can be shifted to make fine adjustments on the remaining strings. Clever!

The slim headstock - which has a cosmetic chamfer that matches the forearm rout - carries vintage-style tuners, while the control arrangement with master tone and volume plus a three-way switch follows convention. However, Wilkinson has elected to position the volume control directly below the pickup and bridge for easy access, and it's mounted over the pickguard.

**SOUNDS**

The pickups really do justice to the Eclat 2's deep, resonant acoustic tone. A slightly hotter-wound bridge pickup gives perfect balance and each unit has a distinct tone, barky with an appealing midrange honk on the bridge and clear, sweet and open on the neck. Together, the midrange phasiness has a natural chorus effect - and it's hum-cancelling, too. This versatile guitar can handle aggressive rock, slide, blues, rockabilly and even bebop. The pickups are precise and articulate, the volume can be backed off without losing clarity, and the tone control also provides plenty of range, from gentle treble 1 to a fully backed-off 'woman' tone.

**VERDICT**

Don't imagine these are just another set of Far Eastern lookalikes, as the standard of the finishing and the quality of the materials and hardware puts them into a



different league. The pickups sound superb, and we cannot identify any area where the hardware could be substantially improved. Both provide excellent value for money and a style that will set you apart from the rest.

**FINAL SCORE**

<b>Build Quality</b> .....	18/20
<b>Playability</b> .....	18/20
<b>Sound</b> .....	18/20
<b>Value for money</b> .....	18/20
<b>Vibe</b> .....	18/20
<b>TOTAL</b> .....	90%
Good for... Rock, punk, blues, slide, roots music	
Look elsewhere... Country twanginess	