

# Hagstrom Ultra Swede

SWEDEN-BASED HAGSTROM STARTED MAKING ELECTRIC GUITARS IN 1958, AND went on to produce a wide range of acoustic and electric models—until it went out of business in 1983. The company started making guitars again in 2006, and it now offers an impressive series of electrics, acoustics, and basses. The Ultra Swede is basically Hagstrom's answer to the Les Paul, however, with its basswood body and set maple neck, the Ultra is a very different animal. Our review model also has the new spalted maple top, which, with its distinctive black grain, cops a very different visual attitude than the flamed or figured maple that you typically see on guitars with carved tops. The Ultra Swede is well made and it sports a fair amount of cosmetic appointments, including pearl celluloid binding on the body, neck, and headstock; abalone/pearl fretboard inlays; and a pearl logo on the headstock. Add the chrome tailpiece cover—which disguises six chrome-plated brass blocks that the strings load through—and the swanky "stair step" tuning machines, and you've got an instrument that definitely makes a bold visual statement.

Our Ultra Swede arrived with an excellent setup and spot-on intonation. The neck has an inviting C shape and the polished frets feel great to bend on. They've also been carefully tapered on their ends to eliminate any prickliness as you slide your hand along the neck. This is an enticing guitar to play and though its controls are simple, the Ultra Swede delivers a surprising broad range of sounds. The coil-split switch really brightens up the response of both pickups, which can be cool for when you need some Strat-style neck pickup wail, or a crisp, shimmering rhythm tone with both pickups on. What's also cool is that the Tone control is useable throughout its entire range—so you can use it to completely roll off the highs without it sounding like there's a mattress over the speaker. The Volume control also keeps the highs intact when it's turned down.

With the pickups in full humbucking mode, the Ultra Swede delivers a throaty overdrive sound with just enough treble bite to maintain good presence in the mix. The output level of the Hagstrom units is on par with other PAF type pickups, and we had no problem getting juicy distortion tones from amps that weren't even particularly high-gain. The Ultra Swede is a very flexible guitar that's as adept at blues or jazz as it is for slammin' out AC/DC riffs. So if you're jonesing for a little upscale visual vibe in an affordable axe that packs a bunch of great sounds, the Ultra Swede could be just what you need. —Art Thompson



## SPECS

<b>Hagstrom,</b> (818) 597-7711; americanmusicandsound.com	
MODEL	Ultra Swede
PRICE	\$479 street
NECK	Maple, set
FRETBOARD	Resinator
FRETS	22 standard
SCALE	24 <sup>3</sup> / <sub>4</sub> "
BODY	Basswood w/spalted maple top
PICKUPS	Hagstrom Custom '58 humbuckers
CONTROLS	Volume, Tone, 3- way selector, mini-toggle coil- splitter
BRIDGE	Tune-o-matic w/Hagstrom stop tailpiece
TUNERS	Hagstrom die- cast
FACTORY STRINGS	??? .009-.042
WEIGHT	7.3 lbs
KUDOS	Excellent tones. Plays well.
CONCERNS	None.