

SWEDE DREAMS

HAGSTROM'S SELECT RANGE ADDS VISUAL FLAIR TO ESTABLISHED MODELS. PAUL SALTER PICKS UP A GOOD-LOOKING SWEDE

... Many guitars on the market today are firmly rooted in the classic designs made famous by Fender and Gibson in the '50s and '60s. But while some have no ambition beyond simply imitating the likes of the Stratocaster and Les Paul, others merely appropriate a few key features from these archetypes and at the same time manage to establish their own individuality.

The Hagstrom Swede has clearly taken a long look at the Gibson Les Paul and, if you list the spec and features of this Select Super Swede you could easily think that it had come straight from the catalogue of a Nashville-based company rather than one from Sweden. So you might assume that there will be few surprises in store from this attractive yet familiar model. However, Hagstrom has always managed to impart plenty of original, sometimes quirky character to its guitars up until now, so let's see how this latest version of the Swede stacks up.

BODY & NECK

The Select Super Swede's most overt sign of individuality is the shape of its body and headstock. Symmetry has gone right out of the window as far as the headstock is concerned. The outline suggests that a bout of hiccups might have guided the designer's pencil here, though this flamboyant shape has become a firmly recognisable symbol of the Hagstrom brand. We're on more familiar ground

with the single-cutaway body outline, although the friendly, rounded curves give the impression that there's a touch of middle-age spread here. However, taken as a whole, we think the guitar looks well-proportioned.

The bulk of the body is a thick slab of mahogany, while the lightly carved top is plain maple (as revealed by the stripped-back 'faux binding' effect around the edge) with a veneer of more attractive quilted maple doing its thing on top. The subtle sunburst finish is somewhat confusingly known as 'dirty blonde', but does a very good job of impersonating a nicely faded cherry sunburst. The hefty combination of body woods does take the overall weight up to a considerable 4kg (8.8lb), but you do get a subtle ribcage contour at the rear of the body to add some comfort, even if your shoulder may suffer when using a narrow strap.

The mahogany neck meets the body with the kind of glued-in joint you'd expect to see on this style of guitar. There's plenty of wood involved to help with that solid feel, and hopefully this will translate to good sustain, so it's a fair trade-off that a bit of effort is required to reach the topmost of those 22 medium frets. These are style-appropriate too, with a fit and finish that's pleasing to see on a guitar at this price. However, it should be noted that Hagstrom has chosen to employ a longer, 25.5-inch scale length (as opposed to Gibson's standard 24.75 inches). It seems we mustn't take anything for granted with this guitar.

The neck echoes the body with its natural-look maple binding, while the fingerboard itself is made from Hagstrom's 'Resinator Wood'. This is a wood-composite material that resembles ebony and is claimed to eliminate dead spots and enhance tone and sustain. The material feels very smooth and even, though it's a shame that a couple of the flashy mother-of-pearl and abalone inlays are a little untidy, especially considering the competent standard of the binding and fretwork.

Forgetting these trifling visual concerns, the neck plays wonderfully. It falls somewhere between Gibson's '50s and '60s neck profiles and is quite chunky in cross section, but there's not so much depth that the average guitarist would find it unwieldy. Instead, the comfortable, rounded shape provides plenty of support for your fretting hand.

HARDWARE & PARTS

Tuning the Super Swede for the first time might give the impression that the hardware is somewhat below par. The tuners, with their impressively ornate keys, do their job perfectly well but just don't feel that positive or smooth in use.

The bridge arrangement, on the other hand, is great – this is a well-engineered Tune-O-Matic-style bridge with lots of scope for tweaking the intonation. The hefty tailpiece staggers the ends of the strings in separate brass anchor blocks, mounted on a perspex baseplate and covered with a steel guard. Though rather

GBINFO



HAGSTROM SELECT SUPER SWEDE

PRICE: £649

BUILT IN: China

SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5 inches)

NUT WIDTH: 43mm (1.69 inches)

STRING SPACING AT NUT: 35mm (1.38 inches)

BODY: Mahogany with maple top & quilted maple veneer

NECK: Mahogany, set

FINGERBOARD: Resinator wood, 305mm radius (12 inches)

FRETS: 22 medium

PICKUPS: 2 x Hagstrom Custom 58 humbuckers

CONTROLS: 2 x volume, 2 x tone, 3-way selector, coil-tap mini-switch

BRIDGE: Hagstrom Tune-O-Matic-style bridge & stop tailpiece, chrome

STRING SPACING AT BRIDGE: 52mm (2 inches)

MACHINEHEADS: Hagstrom 18:1 ratio, chrome

WEIGHT: 4kg (8.8lb)

FINISHES: Dirty blonde (shown), vintage sunburst, cocoa

CASE: No

LEFT-HANDERS: Yes

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DETAILS

LIVELY, VERSATILE
SOUNDS FROM A
WELL-MADE GUITAR



■ The Select Super Swede's humbuckers can be split to offer some convincing single-coil sounds



■ Hagstrom's three-a-side asymmetrical headstock is as quirky and distinctive as ever



■ The composite 'Resinator Wood' fretboard is said to eliminate dead spots and enhance tone



GBVERDICT

HAGSTROM SELECT SUPER SWEDE

GOLD STARS

- ★ Friendly neck
- ★ Great range of tones
- ★ Distinctive looks

BLACK MARKS

- Rather heavy
- No case included

IDEAL FOR...

Those looking for a good value, versatile guitar with its own personality

GBRATING



unorthodox, it works perfectly well and is certainly visually distinctive.

The pickups are Hagstrom's own Custom 58 humbuckers. They're based around Alnico-V magnets and are wired to a three-way selector switch with a volume and tone control for each pickup. We're not too sure about the positioning of the selector switch next to the cutaway as it's prone to receiving an accidental knock or two, but the mini-toggle switch that coil-taps both pickups is tucked out of the way behind the volume and tone controls. This option should open up a whole host of pseudo single-coil tones, increasing versatility.

SOUNDS

So, dual humbuckers on a thick, maple-topped mahogany body with a set mahogany neck: no prizes for guessing that we're in the Gibson Les Paul tonal ballpark here. In fact, the Swede does the stereotypical Les Paul thing without breaking a sweat – in full humbucker mode, even a dedicated Gibson-ite could be fooled.

There are some noticeable differences when compared to our

benchmark Les Paul, however. For a start, the Swede has a different flavour in the crucial upper mid-range area, where there's less bite and more of a ringing tonality. This makes for a slightly more breezy and cheerful variation on those classic rock crunch tones that are the reason many seek out this style of guitar.

This helps add good note definition too, working the top-end frequencies to give plenty of cut in a full band mix, without seeming too in-your-face. The neck humbucker does need careful handling as it can suffer from that common complaint of woolly bass notes. However, like the bridge unit, overdriven tones clean up nicely when the volume control is rolled back.

We reckon that for clean tones, the Swede has the edge over our own Les Paul, especially when the coil-tap is engaged. These alternative voicings are really soulful, and thick-sounding enough to stand as viable options in their own right rather than something to be dragged up once in a blue moon. They're clean-edged, bouncy and a very nice addition to those impressive humbucking sounds.

GBCONCLUSION

GREAT CHARACTER AT AN ATTRACTIVE PRICE

■ The Hagstrom Select Super Swede doesn't attempt to replicate a Gibson Les Paul, and it doesn't need to.

There are some companies on the market that attempt to do just that, adding a few visual tweaks to avoid any legal complications and calling it a job done. This guitar bears more than a passing resemblance and shares a similar spec, but there is so much more happening here in terms of character and originality. The tone and the feel are different for a start, but in a way that offers a viable alternative, not as a result of falling short of a specific target. The Select Super Swede ends up being an extremely likeable guitar with excellent playability and a versatile and impressive set of tones. We like it a lot. **GB**