

# GEAR Fight Club

## Gibson Historic '59 Les Paul Vintage Original Spec VS. PRS SC 245

TESTED BY ART THOMPSON

**AFTER BEING PUT BACK INTO PRODUCTION** following the storied court case between Gibson and PRS, the Singlecut was finally retired in 2007, and replaced by the new SC 245, which, aimed at the "traditional" player, sports a 24w" scale (versus the original's 25" scale) and updated 245 humbucking pickups (the Singlecut wore PRS-made #7 'buckers). The SC 245 retains the wide-fat set neck of the Singlecut,

as well as most of its other details, including the dual Volume/Tone control arrangement and Stoptail bridge/tailpiece.

Equipped with a luscious "10" top (\$720 extra) and abalone bird inlays (\$420 extra), our SC 245 hits a retail price of \$4,460. We had hoped to find a similarly priced Les Paul for this contest, but that kind of money doesn't go very far when you're talking Custom Shop

Gibson, and to get a model that could rival the PRS's stunning top, we had to go with a Historic '59 Les Paul Vintage Original Spec, which retails for a lofty \$8,033. A pinch lighter than the SC 245, it is decked out with a beautiful flame maple top and offers many period correct details, including nickel-plated hardware, a one-piece/long-tenon neck with a rounded '59 profile, a holly headstock

### SPECS |

	Gibson, (800) 444-2766; <a href="http://gibson.com">gibson.com</a>	Paul Reed Smith Guitars, (410) 643-9970; <a href="http://prsguitars.com">prsguitars.com</a>
<b>MODEL</b>	Historic '59 Les Paul Vintage Original Spec	SC 245
<b>PRICE</b>	\$8,033 retail/street price N/A	\$3,320 retail, \$4,460 as tested/street price N/A
<b>NUT WIDTH</b>	1 <sup>11</sup> / <sub>16</sub> "	1 <sup>22</sup> / <sub>32</sub> "
<b>NECK</b>	Mahogany	Mahogany
<b>FRETBOARD</b>	24 <sup>3</sup> / <sub>4</sub> "-scale rosewood	24 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>2</sub> "-scale rosewood
<b>FRETS</b>	22 medium-jumbo	22 medium-jumbo
<b>BODY</b>	Solid mahogany with carved flame maple top	Solid mahogany with carved flame maple top
<b>PICKUPS</b>	BurstBucker Treble and Bass	PRS 245 with brushed nickel covers
<b>CONTROLS</b>	Dual Volume and Tone, 3-way pickup selector (CTS pots and "bumble bee" capacitors)	Dual Volume and Tone, 3-way pickup selector
<b>BRIDGE</b>	ABR-1 with lightweight aluminum Stoptail	PRS Stoptail
<b>TUNERS</b>	Vintage "tulip" style	Vintage "tulip" style
<b>FACTORY STRINGS</b>	Gibson, .010-.046	D'Addario, .010-.046
<b>WEIGHT</b>	8.3 lbs	8.4 lbs
<b>KUDOS</b>	Plays and sounds excellent. A beautiful reissue in every way.	Amazing feel and sound. Superbly made. Excellent value.
<b>CONCERNS</b>	Expensive.	None.



veneer, and a thin plastic toggle-switch washer and jack plate.

Physically speaking, the SC 245 is a jewel of a guitar. There are no flaws on it anywhere, and its glassy acrylic urethane finish really shows off the lovely graining of the fab looking maple top with its exposed natural color edge. The big frets are nicely polished, and all other details—from the reverse carve on the top's outer edge to the shallow divots that the knobs tuck into to the tidy wiring to the delicate fretboard inlays—are rendered with the utmost care. The blocky nut is the only thing that seems out of step with the rest of the components.

The Historic '59 is more relic than Rolex, but there's a soulfulness to it that is simply transcendent. This guitar wears a honey colored and much less glossy nitrocellulose lacquer finish that looks like it's 50 years old, and if you examine it closely you can see some color bleeding onto the binding here and there. The frets are finished lower and flatter than the SC 245's, and their binding covered tips have a very smooth feel. It's

obvious that some choice woods found their way into the Historic, which is one of the lightest LPs we've seen (nothing was hogged out of the body to make it that way, either). Guitars with thick carved maple tops are noted for their excellent sustain qualities, and when played through a clean amp at low volume, a lightly picked open G sustained for an average of 17 seconds on the Historic '59 versus 15 seconds on the PRS.

The SC 245's buttery smooth playability is well matched by the excellent playing feel of the Historic '59. Both guitars have fairly chunky necks that feel great in your hands, and their actions are low and buzz free. The SC 245 is perhaps a little easier to bend on—its frets are taller and more rounded than the Historic's, and its scale is slightly shorter—but there isn't a night and day difference between the two in that regard. One thing that does differentiate these guitars in a *big* way, however, is their resistance to microphonic feedback. The SC 245 rules here, as you can pretty much dime your amp's high-gain channel and press the guitar up against

the speakers without getting any protest from the pickups. With the Historic '59 on the other hand, we could barely open up the amp's master volume without incurring the squealing wrath from the un-potted pickups. The BurstBuckers' looser and less controlled character is a big part of the 'Paul's personality, of course, but you do have to be mindful of their feedback-y nature.

To find out how the tones of these guitars compared, we played them through a bunch of different amps, including a Budda 10th Anniversary Twinmaster combo, a new VHT Sig:X half-stack, and a Savage Rohr 15 combo. In this arena, neither guitar trumps the other. The SC 245 is a modern classic and has a more "produced" sound, while the Historic—which is painstakingly designed to sound like an old guitar—is rawer and more elemental. That said, both instruments sound glorious in their own way. If you want buttery smooth tones with just right blend of sparkle and fullness, the SC 245 is a great choice. This guitar sounds great clean, but it's so perfectly voiced for rock that you just

want to slather on the distortion and bask in the swarm of rich, sustaining harmonics that pour from it. Switching to the Historic '59, you notice how its voice is a little more pointed and in your face. It's just as fat sounding as the PRS, but there's a brightness and zinginess to it that harks to the classic Les Paul sounds of yore—think Duane Allman on the live tracks of *Eat a Peach*. Differences noted, the SC 245 and Historic '59 are versatile guitars that can be everything from warm and jazzy to thuggishly metaloid.

The dual-pickup settings on these instruments yielded a similarly broad range of sounds, and the independent Volume controls let you dial in a lot of superb niche textures by blending the neck and bridge pickups. Both guitars do a good job of preserving the highs when you roll down their Volume controls, and they have equally useable Tone controls that encourage you to perform Buchanan-style tonal inflections down to nearly their zero settings. The light feeling knobs on the SC 245 are arranged so that the

Volumes are on the top and Tones on the bottom, which makes it easy to do pinky swells on either pickup. The controls on the Historic '59 have a more solid feel, but those pointed metal indicators under each knob are capable of drawing blood if you're not careful. Why Gibson still uses them—or doesn't at least round off their points—is mystifying.

It would be hard to imagine that someone who loves Les Pauls would want anything other than a Les Paul, and for those players, the Historic '59 is the next best thing to owning a vintage model—which, of course, you'd never be able to gig with. The Historic '59 is the hippest choice for the discerning LP fan, and if you can swing one you will not be disappointed by what this dead-nuts replica delivers. If you can get your game face on with something other than a Les Paul, however, the SC 245 is clearly the way to go. Stunningly appointed and priced thousands less than the Historic (even with options), it's the superior deal for anyone who wants a first-class ticket on the dual-humbucker/maple-top route. 