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Light, with accurate vintage looks and cracking sounds



The first US-built JL Casino was a peach, but the price didn't suit us sat in the cheap seats. Perhaps the 'Inspired By' version will find a working class audience. Review by Dave Walsh

Epiphone

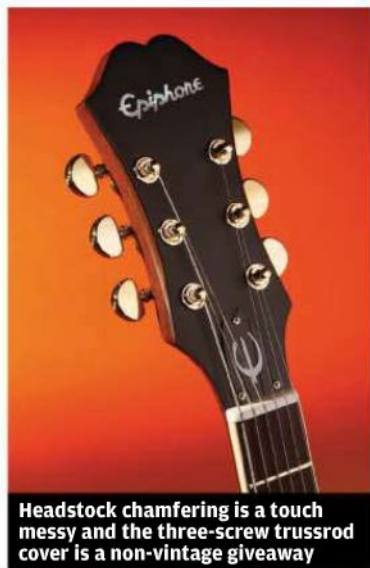
'Inspired By' John Lennon Revolution Casino

Only a handful of artists truly transcend time and fickle musical trends. The Beatles deserve their towering status, and as iconic musical figures go, few carry such weight as John Lennon. In the 30 years since his murder outside his New York apartment, his legend has grown beyond the staggering musical legacy he left behind.

Many of those songs were played or composed on his natural finish Epiphone Casino, and there have been a few attempts at replicating this famous instrument: the recently discontinued US-built version was made using the original guitar as a template, but the \$4000 price tag kept it out of reach of most.

Keen to redress the balance, Epiphone has produced a series of Lennon 'Inspired By' instruments. There are two versions: the '1965 Casino' with a sunburst finish as Lennon would have purchased it, and this post-modification 'Revolution' version. Lennon famously sanded the sunburst finish from his own guitar, and it's in this state that we can see it being used on much of the Beatles' subsequent output (including the rooftop gig on the Apple building in January 1969) and a fair amount of his post-Beatles work.

Borrowing Gibson Custom's Historic 'Inspired By' moniker (seen on the Robby Krieger SG for example) to upgrade what is essentially a standard Indonesian-made Casino with higher quality components, the guitar closely apes the modifications Lennon carried out on his own model but



Headstock chamfering is a touch messy and the three-screw trussrod cover is a non-vintage giveaway



Gold Grovers, just as John fitted, plus a Lennon squiggle. The slim, satin-finish neck feels superb

There are two 'Inspired By' JL Casinos – the 1965 in sunburst and the stripped, post-modification Revolution version

at a far lower price than before. Unlike the centre-blocked ES-335, the Casino borrowed the ES-330's construction. The maple laminate body is completely hollow and the distinctive wide bout twin-cutaway shape is bound both front and back with single-layer faded white binding. The pseudo stripped/natural finish is actually quite convincing for a high-run production model and even the sides of the neck/fingerboard tongue

look realistically sanded back. Also in keeping with the original design, the 22-fret neck joins the body at the 16th fret and a period-correct rectangular blue label is visible in the upper f-hole. Even the inner walls of the f-hole routings are blacked out, again mimicking the residue of an original sunburst finish. There's no scratchplate fitted, but there's one supplied in the case along with all the necessary bracket and screws. ➤

FACTFILE

'INSPIRED BY' JOHN LENNON REVOLUTION CASINO

Description: Hollowbody electric guitar. Built in Indonesia

Price: £844

Build: Laminated maple body, mahogany set neck with 22-fret bound rosewood fingerboard. Tune-o-matic bridge with trapeze tailpiece and gold Grover tuners

Electrics: Gibson USA P90R in neck and P90T in bridge position. Master volume and tone for each with Switchcraft three-way toggle switch and Switchcraft jack

Finishes: Lennon natural (as reviewed) or vintage sunburst

Left Hand: No

Scale Length: 628mm/24.75"

Neck Width: Nut 42.8mm
12th fret 52.9mm

Depth of neck: First fret 21.6mm
12th fret 25mm

String spacing: Nut 35mm
Bridge 51.8mm

Action as supplied: 12th fret treble 1.0mm
12th fret bass 1.2mm

Weight: 3kg/6.6lbs

Contact: Gibson
020 7167 2144
www.gibson.com

THE COMPETITION

GRETSCH G5122DC

A double-cutaway version of the Electromatic G5120 hollowbody. Laminated maple in black or walnut finish, Gretsch Dual-Coil pickups, Adjusto-Matic floating bridge, Bigsby licensed B60 and chrome-plated vintage tuners

RRP: £715

VINTAGE VSA590 Series

A semi rather than true hollow body, with a sunburst maple body and mahogany neck with nickel hardware and Wilkinson P90s with nickel covers

RRP: £449

PEAVEY JF-1 EXP

Entry-level price for this light maple ply hollowbody in a neat sunburst. Set maple neck, pearl block inlays and two Peavey humbuckers plus adjustable two-part stop tailpiece with tune-o-matic bridge

RRP: £279

The Lennon signature along with the hair and glasses doodle/serigraph sits on the back of the headstock which houses a set of gold Grover tuners, Lennon having ditched the original Klusons when the guitar was stripped. Further attentions to detail include a plain black toggle switch ring and gold Gibson-style bell volume and tone knobs. Next to these knobs are a high quality Switchcraft three-way toggle switch and jack which feed the output from a pair of delicious-looking Gibson USA P90 pickups with nickel-plated dog-ear covers screwed straight into the body.

SOUNDS

While the valve amp went through its warm up cycle, I absently strummed the Casino unplugged. Ten minutes later I realised that I still hadn't plugged it in. The acoustic voice has such presence and character that you could happily consider ditching the lounge acoustic all together. The hollow build relies on the set neck angle, strength of the arched top and string pressure across the tuneomatic from the trapeze-style tailpiece to produce resonance and boy, does it work. The supplied low playing action doesn't suck any sustain and it's a breeze to play thanks to 22 medium gauge frets installed neatly across the 14" radius rosewood fingerboard above a slim tapered neck.

Eventually conceding that I really had to evaluate the P90s I plugged in and was rewarded with a warm, buttery amplified version of the acoustic tone. The wide beefiness of the pickups colours the tone but retains the mellow, air and presence that makes partial chord rhythms or



You can't adjust Epiphone Casino pickups for overall height, but with these Gibson USA units the bridge/neck balance is pretty good

By fitting upgraded US components, Epiphone has transformed a good guitar into a gig-worthy, reliable instrument

flat-out open chord strumming come alive with chiming authority. Increasing the amp volume and gain for a realistic non-master volume '60s Vox tone takes you on an edge-of-the-seat ride, where clattering, clashing slashed chords attempt to veer you off into feedback but just keep the seat belts on. With this kind of open amp setting, using the guitar's volume controls to clean the ragged edge from the tone puts you firmly in Abbey Road. The bridge P90 is juicy and vibrant while the neck unit is nicely balanced, deeper yet still full of usable clarity. There's plenty of percussive clatter in the 'live' nature of the vibrating top at volume, and even the odd rattle and thump just adds more authenticity.

VERDICT

For a production run guitar, the attention to detail and scruffy aesthetics (some of them, we guess, intentional) genuinely deserve praise. Whatever the reason Lennon stripped his guitar - the search for tone or just to make it look different to McCartney's - the result is a potent symbol of a lost and at times maverick genius, and Epiphone captures it faithfully here without a Custom Shop price.

But the looks are only half the story; the sound is equally impressive. By fitting

high-quality upgraded US components at the factory, Epiphone has transformed what would have been a merely good guitar instantly into a no-nonsense, gig-worthy and reliable instrument. The combination of a vintage hollowbody with big shiny P90s strapped across it shouldn't limit the appeal to hardcore Lennon fans, and there's also the vanilla '1965 Casino' if you prefer stock looks, but by completing the package with a ready-to-play feel plus a decent hardcase chucked in and a percentage of the sale proceeds donated to the John Lennon Scholarship Fund for music education, there's nowt to quibble about. The RRP is also a touch misleading, as a good root around should see you walk off with one for under £700. And that's a bargain.



Authentic raised-diamond trapeze tailpiece: the top mounted jack means a right-angled plug is probably a good idea

FINAL SCORE

Build Quality	18/20
Playability	19/20
Sound	19/20
Value for money	18/20
Vibe.....	19/20

TOTAL 93%

Good for... the vintage Epiphone Casino vibe and sounds for less money

Look elsewhere... for a solidbody tone, humbucking pickups or a Bigsby vibrato