

Retro of the Gods

The PRS Starla

IT SEEMS THAT ACROSS THE guitar industry, manufacturers are embracing the funky, cheapo look of '60s imports. From Eastwood to Reverend to anything with P-90s or Filtertrons, that "garage rock" vibe is hotter than hell these days.

Probably the last company you'd expect to veer that way is Paul Reed Smith, perhaps because their guitars have always been the epitome of classical balance, elegance, and taste. But the company shook things up recently with the double-cut Mira and now is really rockin' the cradle with the Starla, a seriously retro plank with a beefy bod, gnarly chrome humbuckers, and a big, honkin' Bigsby vibrato. Has the world gone mad? Well, maybe so. But if the Starla is any indication, perhaps that's for the best.

In terms of design, the Starla is a relatively simple and straightforward vintage machine. It is a single-cutaway solidbody with a mahogany body and neck that's 24 1/2" in scale (a quarter-inch shorter than a Les Paul). The guitar sports an 22-fret east-Indian rosewood fingerboard with dot inlays (abalone bird inlays are optional for an additional cost, however).

Hardware includes a Grover Tune-O-Matic bridge, vintage-style tuners, and a black pickguard, while the electronics feature Starla Treble and Bass pickups (made with Alnico magnets), and master volume and tone controls with a three-way blade switch. Color options

include Vintage Cherry, Vintage Mahogany, Vintage Orange and Black. Like I said, all pretty straightforward.

How's she play? Ah, that's where the magic comes into play – that famed PRS-neck voodoo. This model has the so-called "Wide Fat" neck profile and it's just glorious. All my doubts about this strange, retro beast disappeared the moment I wrapped my fingers around this neck. Modeled after some of the big necked guitars of the '50s, the Wide Fat is very comfortable and familiar to the hand, and felt great right out of the case.

True to form, the Starla also has a "wide-fat" tone, meaning it sounded big and warm, and everything you'd expect from a PRS. It's always amazing when you play a guitar that's well built, uses excellent materials, and is perfectly setup; you simply play that much better as a guitarist. And through a variety of tube amp heads, it all sounded good, from clean to dirty to flat-out crunchy. Even the Bigsby performed great, staying in tune after some well-appointed string bends and jiggles.

At the end of the day, the PRS Starla is a wonderful vintage-style axe. It may feature design appointments that speak to its vintage/retro ancestry, but the immaculate construction and top-notch materials are oh-so different from the those cheap, twangy guitars from four decades past. It may look funky, but no question, the Starla is simply badass! – **Pete Prown**



PRS STARLA

Price: \$2,480
Contact: www.prsguitars.com.