



## Case J1 Gold Top £2,050

Known for some unusual hollow V-style guitars, Case also builds more conventional electrics. Here's one of them...

**J**on Case is a guitar maker who's based in Kent, but he's also one of those incredibly annoying people who are rather good at two things. Firstly, there's graphic design (which is his actual profession) and then there's guitar making (his passion, which has become a growing part of his livelihood). We featured his interesting hollow-bodied take on the Flying V back in issue 295 and it's little surprise one of his customers is Andy Powell of Wishbone Ash. But Case offers more than just unconventional guitars. His sharp visual sense is matched

by his highly detailed instruments, from this J1 single-cut on review to larger hollow-bodied jazz guitars such as the J3, which is already endorsed by jazz guitarist and composer Phil Robson.

The J1 is an ambitious design, but Case has his craft in perfect order – in terms of build it's impossible to fault. The J1's influence is obvious and Case is far from the first maker to offset Gibson's finest, but along with a chambered mahogany body that ensures a lighter weight and added resonance, there's a supermodel-like aesthetic that matches the headstock tip, 12th fret inlay and fingerboard base in a very considered manner.

At full depth it's Les Paul-like (58mm). There's no ribcage contour but the heel area is sculptured and feels a lot less chunky than you find with the original. The neck's wide 'C'-profile (21.3mm at the first, 23mm at the 12th) feels serious in the hand, there's also a volute under the thin and narrow nut/truss rod cavity area, and the classic 12-inch radius fingerboard with its super smooth fret job (2.82mm wide by approximately 1.38mm high) is fine work indeed. The finish is the only nitro-cellulose gloss here and is perfectly done to Collings-like precision.

With four controls (a two control layout is standard) laid

out like a PRS Singlecut and shoulder-mounted toggle the pickups are designed to Case's specs by Bare Knuckle and don't allow any polepiece adjustment. Sperzels are again the tuner choice, this time non-locking, and the headstock design allows virtual straight string pull while the adjustable wrapover bridge (again a close cousin to PRS's design) is by the small US maker Pigtail.

### Sounds

Lightweight and balanced on the strap with an energetic resonance, the J1, as its construction suggests, produces an interesting array of sounds. There's a nice width to the tonality, plenty of lows and clear highs with a slightly scooped mid-range. It summons an older, more resonant Les Paul or even an ES-335 sound rather than a modern day full-on rock LP. Both pickups sound very well balanced both in terms of string-to-string balance and comparable outputs. There's also a detailed transparency to the tone that you don't always hear. Consequently there's not

a whole lot that the J1 can't handle, from clean ringing voices and articulate jazz tones to classic and even heavier rock styles. It plays beautifully and sounds even and responsive. There's a tightness to the string tension that, combined with a neck that's on the wide side of the tracks, makes you want to dig in – no problems there then. This guitar is feline in design with a cultured, boutique-like classic voice.

### Verdict

The J1 is a more than acceptable introduction to the work of Jon Case. It's a beautifully put together instrument, referencing old-style Les Paul values but with a modernistic slant. But taking on one of the world's most iconic electric guitar designs means that we have an awful lot of other choices, especially at this fair but far from cheap price. There's no doubt it sounds beautiful and is an awesome player, but is that enough?

### The Bottom Line

**We like:** Build quality; vintage-y single-cut tone; classy interpretation of the single-cut design

**We dislike:** The shape might be just too leftfield for some

**Guitarist says:** The J1 is a superb introduction to the work of an elite luthier

### The Rivals

Going head-to-head with the welter of single-cuts means that the Case has some stiff competition. **Gibson's 1957 Goldtop VOS** (£2,599) is as close to the real thing as Gibson makes today. **PRS's SC245** (£2,695) lists Gold Top among its colour options and comes with 24.5-inch scale, covered 245 humbuckers and Stop-Tail wrapover bridge. A more affordable, slightly eccentric single-cut is **Duesenberg's Starplayer** (£699) – it's not available in Gold Top, but there's a choice of six colours and a tasty retro vibe.

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### Case J1 Gold Top

**PRICE:** £2,050 (inc case)

**ORIGIN:** UK

**BODY:** Semi-hollow Brazilian mahogany with carved maple cap

**NECK:** Brazilian mahogany

**SCALE LENGTH:** 629mm (24.75-inch)

**NUT/WIDTH:** Graph Tech/43.8mm

**FINGERBOARD:** Rosewood with 12th fret mother-of-pearl 'wave' inlay, 305mm (12-inch) radius

**FRETS:** 22, jumbo (Dunlop 6100)

**HARDWARE:** Pigtail adjustable wrapover bridge, Sperzel tuners – all nickel-plated

**STRING SPACING, BRIDGE:** 52mm

**ELECTRICS:** Two Case/Bare Knuckle humbuckers, three-way toggle pickup selector, volume and tone for each pickup (with pull/push pot to control coil split)

**WEIGHT (kg/lb):** 3.29/7.25

**OPTIONS:** The base price of the J1 Gold Top is £1,950. Numerous no cost options include mahogany or USA black walnut body and neck, neck dimensions, fretwire, 25-inch scale length, 24 frets, pickups, plastic mounting rings, chrome or nickel hardware. AAAA maple top (£POA), Hipshot vibrato (£250), Sperzel locking tuners (£50) and dual volume/tone (as reviewed, adds £100) are also available. More on application

**RANGE OPTIONS:** The J1 Flame (from £2,450) comes in a range of colour finishes with AAAA-grade figured maple top and subtly upgraded specs. See website for more models

**LEFT-HANDERS:** £POA

**FINISHES:** Metallic antique gold (as reviewed)

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[www.caseguitars.co.uk](http://www.caseguitars.co.uk)

### Test results

Build quality	★★★★
Playability	★★★★
Sound	★★★★
Value for money	★★★★

**GUITARIST RATING** ★★★★★