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Vintage and Paul Brett claim this is two guitars in one, but can it really live up to that? **Sam Wise** finds out.

JHS' Vintage brand impresses us often here at *Acoustic*. Despite the budget price tag, and a name redolent of 80s shopping catalogue purchases, Vintage repeatedly produce some of the best value for money guitars you can find, often giving their more expensive competition a scare. Former 70s rocker Paul Brett, meanwhile, not only regularly regales *Acoustic* readers with his vintage guitar expertise, he has managed to parlay that knowledge into a line of vintage inspired signature models. The latest edition to Brett's range is the Gemini, a guitar which he and Vintage claim can perform equally well as a baritone or a standard tuned guitar.

BUILD QUALITY

Vintage sent us two of these, one strung standard, and the other with a set of heavier gauge baritone strings to allow it to be tuned B-B, or even A-A, but as they are otherwise identical, we'll save that comparison for the sounds section. Everyone knows Paul loves old guitars, and the Gemini carries lots of his signature style; the solid spruce top is finished in an antique brown which is echoed on the solid mahogany back and sides, but the pickguard styling is a departure from his previous instruments. The top is bound in white plastic, with the back not bound at all, and the rosette is again a super simple white ring, almost hidden by the pickguard. The mahogany neck is cut in a lovely chunky vintage V profile with an unbound sonokeling fingerboard. The scale length is 24.75 inches, which, interestingly for a guitar with pretensions to baritone tuning, is not even at the long end of the typical standard guitar range, with 14

frets to the body, and 21 in total. The peghead is Brett's favoured slotted style, with three on-a-plate open geared tuners. The very simple rectangular sonokeling bridge has a plastic compensated saddle, and the nut is similarly plastic. The guitar is fitted with Fishman's redoubtable Matrix VT1 pickup system, and in keeping with the vintage appearance, there's no head unit or onboard EQ; you simply plug into the endpin jack and go.

Looks-wise, this guitar would be an eye catcher even without the pickguard; the antique finish and slotted headstock set it apart from almost anything in its price range, and it's convincingly old school; you can imagine a guitar like this in a black and white photograph with Robert Johnson. Add in that very unusual pickguard and you've got something that might polarise opinion; we really like it, it has the standout visual appeal of something like Fender's Pawn Shop Series, though we would probably make the pickguard tortoiseshell. An all-solid guitar for £400 is bargain basement territory, and rather than compromise on materials, Vintage has held back on any fancy appointments, which is aided by the retro look. Quality-wise, though, it upholds Vintage's reputation; there might not be the impressive detailing you'd find on a £2,000 guitar, but everything here is well executed; the action is a good compromise, intonation is excellent, there are no rough fret ends or other telltale signs of corner cutting.

SOUNDS & PLAYABILITY

First off, we love to play Paul's guitars; the V profile to the neck is something which is all too uncommon these



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VINTAGE GEMINI

NEED TO KNOW

Manufacturer: Vintage
Model: Gemini
Body Size: Parlour
Made In: Far East
Top: Solid spruce
Back and Sides: Solid mahogany
Neck: Mahogany
Fingerboard: Sonokeling
Frets: 21
Tuners: Chrome open gear
Scale Length: 628mm
Onboard Electronics: Fishman Matrix VT1
Strings Fitted: High quality USA
Gig Bag/Case Included: Padded carry bag

ACOUSTIC TEST RESULTS

Pros: Great look, nice balanced tone, lovely V profile neck

Cons: Won't be everyone's idea of a baritone

Overall: Offers a lot for the money with a reputable name behind it

ACOUSTIC RATING

Sound Quality: ★★★★★

Build Quality: ★★★★★

Value for Money: ★★★★★

CONTACT DETAILS:

John Hornby Skewes

www.jhs.co.uk

days, and we love the way it welcomes the fretting hand. If you're a real speed freak, you might find it restrictive, but how many of us really play that way? The body is not so big as to be obstructive, and the relatively short scale makes for quite a light string tension.

Picking up the standard strung guitar first, it delivers what we would hope for from the wood combination; bright and sparkling top end, warmish midrange, and a strong, fairly focussed bass. It's a nice enough picker,

but really comes into its own when you strum it hard; there's plenty of headroom, and we couldn't compromise the tone no matter how hard we pushed it. These guitars have to survive long sea journeys and a big change of climate from their origin in the Far East, so they can't hope to be as light and responsive as a handmade guitar from this part of the world, but they are so much better than one could buy at this price a few years ago that it seems churlish to complain. The baritone tuned model feels immediately different due to the significantly heavier string gauge and, sonically, it's very different too. The decision to go with a relatively short scale has an impact here; plenty of standard tuned guitars have a scale length in this range and Taylor, for instance, uses a 27-inch scale for their baritones - here the scale length is 24.75 inches. The scale here results in quite a thumping quality to the bass, unless you play very gently; delicate fingerstyle reveals what might have been, with the lowest string blooming harmonics as it decays, but dig in, and you get slightly muddy, very vintage tone which really

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lends itself to blues and rock and roll licks, but isn't friendly to those who want a really clearly defined bass. Playing up the neck, there is a tendency to a little rattle too; nothing unmanageable, but we can't help wishing for a longer scale version.

CONCLUSION

If you want a largish bodied, solid guitar with vintage styling, you can't go wrong with this. It has striking good looks and a lovely balanced tone - and is an awful lot of guitar for the money. Does it live up to the two guitars in one tag though? Well, only if you want a pretty specific type of baritone. Realistically, though, you're going to buy this for one thing or the other; nobody is going to change strings twice a week (or twice a set), so make sure you're testing this in the format you intend to use it, and you will be a very happy customer indeed.

Sam Wise

