

PHOTOGRAPHY JESSE WILD

Duesenberg Starplayer TV-MC £1,195

Tom Petty's guitarist steps out of the shadows with an anniversary guitar by Dave Burrluck

The rivals

Gretsch G6129T Silver Jet	£1,749
Yamaha SA503 TVL Troy Van Leeuwan signature	£649
Epiphone Wildkat	£499

Easily the coolest member of what is already a pretty frosty roster, this version of the Gretsch Silver Jet bristles with a pair of Filter'Trons, a Space Control bridge and Bigsby wiggle stick. The semi-acoustic mahogany body and maple top give just the right amount of tonal sprang too. Troy Van Leeuwan's signature is based on a ES-335 but, like the Campbell, bristles with left-field vibe: three P-90-style single-coils, unusual but versatile switching and the ubiquitous Bigsby. The Epi's Wildkat is a great but left-field axe with a cool rockabilly vibe married to a decent spec that includes two covered P-90s and the obligatory Bigsby.

If you try to describe the playing style of Mike Campbell, words and phrases like tasteful, melodic, classic rock 'n' roll spring immediately to mind. Throughout all of Tom Petty's catalogue – from 1976's Tom Petty & The Heartbreakers to 2006's Highway Companion – Campbell's guitar rarely strays from the hook. As co-producer of many of Petty's albums it frankly would be impossible to think of Petty without Campbell. But the classic sideman has rarely stepped into the spotlight, making this Duesenberg signature guitar so timely. Designed to celebrate 30 years of Tom Petty & The Heartbreakers, officially in 2006, some of us may think it's a little late.

Dieter Goelsdorf's Duesenberg brand continues to impress, not least with its strong design style but also the will to get the guitars into hands of musicians such as Campbell and Ronnie Wood – who plays them too.

As the name suggests, this Campbell signature is based on the semi-solid Starplayer TV, the cornerstone of the Duesenberg range and last reviewed in Guitarist in issue 279 in its Outlaw format. This MC is basically the same guitar – which to recap is a single-cutaway, centre-blocked semi with an arched, spruce-faced laminate top, arched maple laminate back and maple laminate sides. The basic construction is handled in Korea and the assembly is undertaken in Germany – the hardware and parts are from various Far Eastern and German sources.

The major difference to this version is the metallic blue finish with its hardly subtle white racing stripes – a pretty popular motif for retro instruments. Then, as usual, we get an abundance of metal: the excellent Duesenberg Bigsby-style upgraded vibrato, the nickel-plated knobs, the pickup side covers, not forgetting the very neat tuners. There's an over-large white label visible through the single f-hole that tells you exactly what this model is and, in case you should forget, we have Campbell's signature and 30th emblem engraved on the nickel-plated scratchplate. To be honest you're not quite sure whether you should play it or start tuning it up for a whiz around a racetrack.

STARPLAYER TV-MC	TEST RESULTS
Build quality	★★★½☆
Playability	★★★★☆
Sound	★★★★☆
Value for money	★★★½☆

■ **WE LIKED** Design; versatile sounds

■ **WE DISLIKED** The finish is, er, quite striking but there are conventional finishes available without the Campbell signature

SOUNDS: As you'd expect, this is no metal monster, but if you want some bell-like clarity and bite – think Fender with a little more balls – then the Starplayer TV provides it in heaps.

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The semi-hollow nature seems to open out the mid-range, there's certainly plenty of lows to avoid things sounding too thin and the high end is bright but not overly abrasive. In fact, with a clean Fender amp tone there's more than a hint of single-coil from the bridge humbucker while the humbucking-sized P-90 is softer and velveteen in its texture. It easily handles light crunch and classic rock tones – pushing the gain further does induce feedback but in a useable fashion which begs to be manipulated by that excellent wiggle stick. Via a small wiring mod (effectively the bridge humbucker is turned to single-coil), the mixed sounds have a little added bite and sparkle and thanks to a treble bleed capacitor on the volume control the sound cleans up very nicely as you reduce the volume. In fact, there are some very neat sounds here if you're prepared to look for them.

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Campbell, of course, seems to use anything to ply his craft – Goldtops, Broadcasters, Juniors, Teles, Danos, Rickies and more – so it's doubtful that this Starplayer would replace that arsenal. Yet the neat thing about this Duesenberg, and the Starplayer TV in general, is that it effortlessly offers those cleaner, more jangly voices that are so much apart of the Tom Petty & The Heartbreakers sound.

Verdict

Not for the first time we find ourselves having to justify the cost of these guitars. Essentially Korean made the workmanship is good though there's a slightly generic feel to the comfortable neck and the way the finish sits over the binding that makes it feel, well, Korean. But with its unique hardware and pickups – not to mention the German assembly – it's easy to see why the Duesenberg guitars sit higher, perhaps, than they should. Yet, here is a unique brand with a lot of style appeal, an increasing roster of artists and above all a classic pop/rock/indie sound that may be firmly rooted in the past but is still extremely mainstream and relevant today. G

Duesenberg Starplayer TV-MC

Guitarist RATING ★★★★½



The Duesenberg Grand Vintage bridge humbucker

DUESENBERG STARPLAYER TV-MC

PRICE: £1,195 (inc case)
ORIGIN: Korea/Germany
TYPE: Single-cutaway, arched-top semi-solid electric
BODY: Spruce-faced arched top laminate, flamed maple laminate arched back and sides; centre block (unspecified). Fully bound
NECK: Hard rock maple, glued-in
SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5-inch)
NUT/WIDTH: White synthetic/42mm
FINGERBOARD: Bound rosewood, pearloid dots, 356mm (14-inch) radius
FRETS: 22, medium jumbo
HARDWARE: Duesenberg Super Tremola vibrato, tune-o-matic-style bridge, Duesenberg Deluxe enclosed tuners with three-Step kidney-shaped buttons – all nickel-plated
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 52mm
ELECTRICS: Duesenberg Grand Vintage humbucker at bridge and DP90 single-coil at neck, three-way toggle pickup selector switch, volume and tone
WEIGHT (kg/lbs): 3.7/8.5
OPTIONS: The standard Starplayer TV starts at £950, with the solidbody Starplayer Special retailing between £669 and £689, depending on options and spec. The Star bass goes for £1,145
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISHES: Sky blue sparkle only
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www.duesenbergusa.com

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