

# Vintage Vibe

Looking rather like something The Mod Squad might have cooked up, the ProShop Unique range from Vintage offers bashed-up and aged versions of those classics you can't afford

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## VINTAGE PROSHOP V120 & V100 £999 & £1,499

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### What You Need To Know

- 1 Reliced copies! Whatever next?**  
Vintage already has its Icon range where the models are reliced in their factories of origin in China and Vietnam. These ProShop Unique guitars are one-offs that start with a standard Vintage model and are aged and modded here in the UK.
- 2 Do they offer custom orders?**  
At the moment, these are almost concept guitars illustrating what the small team at John Hornby Skewes can create. They hope to offer a bespoke service in the near future, but you can put in a request via any Vintage dealer.
- 3 We don't usually see Bigsby's and Bare Knuckle pickups on a Vintage guitar...**  
That's the point. A staple of retailers all over the world, Vintage is renowned for its affordability and obviously has to use hardware and pickups that don't break the bank. These ProShop guitars illustrate that a good chassis can really punch well above its weight when combined with some quality parts.

**W**e last caught up with Vintage, the house brand of the large and long-running UK distributor John Hornby Skewes (JHS), back in issue 465 to celebrate its 25th Anniversary. Many players will be familiar with its legal copies of many classics, and the company was also quick to jump on the relic bandwagon with its Icon range, which started back in 2006 and currently features over 20 models aged at their source in the Eastern Asia.

The ProShop Unique guitars were launched just before the pandemic at Winter NAMM 2020. However, these instruments are created from standard Vintage Reissued or Icon models in Garforth, Leeds, at JHS's HQ. It's not really a range as much as a continuing collection of one-offs, often quite heavily distressed, using a selection of aftermarket parts.

Each guitar includes a Vintage-branded luxury gigbag, ProShop leather strap, pick tin, t-shirt and certificate of authenticity. Obviously, since all the modding and refinishing work is done here in the UK, these ProShop Unique models can easily double the prices (or more) of the regular Vintage models – and the builds so far start at £569 for a lightly reliced standard Strat-inspired V6, up to £1,299 for a Bare Knuckle-equipped Keef-style V52 five-string named 'Brown Sugar'. We were asked to spec a couple of builds for this review. Here's what we got...

### V120

Many people creating one-off relics like to imagine a backstory because that can really influence the choice of upgrades and relicing level. This one, for example, is based on this writer's experience of being asked to evaluate a Les Paul Junior some years back that a friend had been offered. Apparently a 50s Junior previously owned by a big-name player, it had been heavily, ahem, customised with a bright red refinish. It might have said Gibson on the headstock, but we couldn't find any part on the guitar that we could 100 per cent ID as being from a *real* Gibson. For all we knew, it could have been a copy with a faux Gibson headstock facing masquerading as a mucked-about real LP Junior.

No-one is going to mistake this V120 for the real thing. The headstock, with its fluted square top, might not be as graceful as some, and the V120 and our V100 share a similarly thinned and pointed horn on the treble side, plus a curved shaping to the top of the body that recalls an Aria Pro II more than a Gibson from the 50s.

Based on the Vintage V120TB, which will cost you £339, the body and neck are spec'd as mahogany – we don't know any more than that – and you can certainly see that through the simulated wear-through of the red finish. While it's not the lightest Junior we've ever encountered, it's only marginally heavier than our original.

1. Not necessarily the name you want on the headstock, but this particular one shows some serious wear as well as lifted paint to those logos. You'll notice that

the crazing on the nitro over-spray is very fine

2. These original-style three-on-a-strip tuners are by Grover and are aged in-house at JHS



The only other wood we can see, the fingerboard, is actually something called Lignum Rosa, a name created by experienced guitar designer Alan Entwistle (the man behind the Revelation brand) for this multi-layered wood construct, which is 'quarter-sawn' so the layers create a grain that's at a right-angle to the face. It actually looks like a rosewood, although the fingerboard here is much darker in colour than the V100's.

Aside from the aged refin, then, upgrades over the standard Reissued model are extensive: Grover Deluxe strip tuners, Graph Tech's ResoMax intonated wrapover, and a Bare Knuckle Boot Camp Old Guard dog-ear P90. All the hardware and paint ageing is done in-house and each ProShop Unique also gets a pretty thorough setup, including a fret-level, recrown and polish, and noticeable work to the edges of the fingerboard. All in all, it's a pretty thorough makeover.

This is a continuing collection of one-offs, using a selection of aftermarket parts

## V100

Based on the V100 Boulevard Black (over Gold) we saw in the current ProShop Unique collection, we simply asked for a lighter level of ageing and a pair of Bare Knuckle Boot Camp Old Guard humbuckers to augment the Bigsby, which is aged, as is the bridge with its lockdown roller saddles. The Grover Rotomatics look nicely old, too, and have rear locks, the top-hat knobs are mismatched in colour, and there's no collar around the toggle switch. Headstock and shape aside, this comes across as a Les Paul Standard of a certain age that's been modded and heavily gigged over the years.

While our V120's red-over-sunburst finish is pretty realistic in its wear and the red top-coat has a dulled gloss sheen and no cracking or crazing, it's more like a Gibson VOS finish with a few more dings, to be honest. The black body face of this V100, however, is noticeably crazed, which is mirrored more lightly on the headstock face, while the back, sides and neck back (pretty much the standard factory finish) appear like they were refinished back in the 70s with sandpaper and a spray can. The Vintage and fleur-de-lis headstock inlays look like they've been in a fight with the

## UNDER THE HOOD

Does the vintage illusion continue to the control circuit? We find out...

**T**he tidy work on the exterior of both of these guitars continues into the control cavities where we have 500k CTS pots across the board and 'posh' cloth-covered wire, all wired 50s or 'vintage' style. Metallised polypropylene film capacitors (223J) .022 microfarads caps are used on all three tone controls. Vintage hasn't gone down the expensive paper-in-oil boutique route; you can try that yourself. That said, the pot codes date to December 2002. "Can we call those vintage?" laughs Nathan Sharp. "They're actually from my own stash. We use cloth wiring just to try to match in looks some of the 'age' of the instrument."

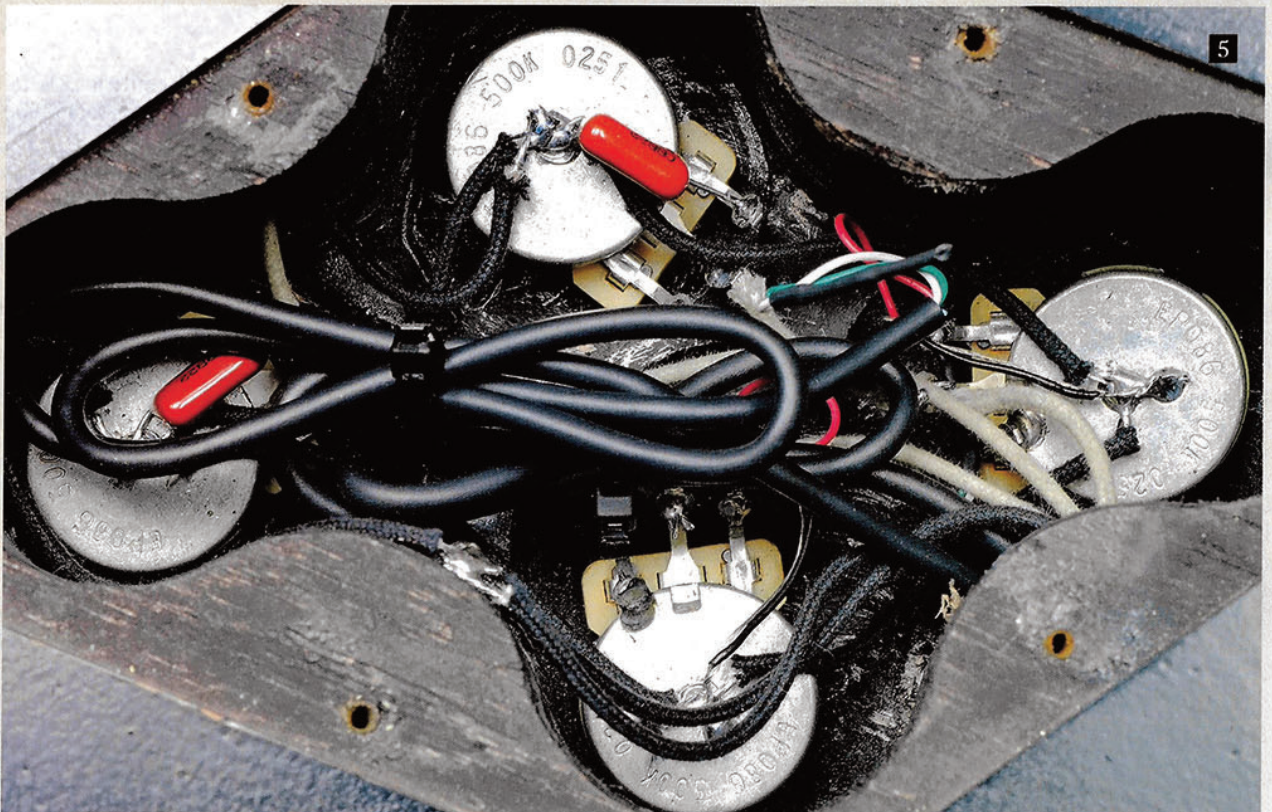
Bare Knuckle's Boot Camp range offers all the great sound we've come to expect but in a no-options format, which allows them to be made more cost-effectively. We have the lowest-output Alnico II Old Guards in all positions, and the DCRs measure at output 9kohms (bridge) and 7.99k (neck) for the humbuckers, and 7.65kohms for the dog-ear P-90.



3. Tidy vintage-style wiring on our V120

4. Bare Knuckle Boot Camp pickups are used on both our ProShop models

5. There's plenty of wire packed into the V100, but it's a vintage-style circuit again



6. This locking roller saddle bridge is available as a retrofit from WD Music and StewMac. Taylor has long used it on its T3 guitars. There's plenty of wear to its chrome finish and authentic ageing to the Bigsby. We were tempted to give it a polish!

7. Hiding under the dog-ear cover is Bare Knuckle's Boot Camp Old Guard P90. The bridge, with its pre-set intonation ridge, "is made from our lightweight alloy designed to have your guitar bursting with harmonics", says Graph Tech. It also magnetically locks to the posts



chicken wire in front of the stage – and, of course, you know it's all make-believe, but you really can imagine the life and history of a guitar that ends up looking like this. The brass rear-cavity covers certainly recall the brass parts craze of the late 70s; the fact that they're actually hand-cut from old time-aged brass sheet just adds to the backstory. Numerous small details such as this really add to the illusion.

Like the V120, the only bare wood we can see is that man-made fingerboard, but according to the spec this is a mahogany body with a maple top. The thicker body, not to mention that Bigsby, add to the weight here, which edges just past the 4kg (9lb) mark. But that's not over-heavy and, frankly, if you can live with the fact it's got the wrong headstock and horn shape, what's not to like?

### Feel & Sounds

It's pretty rare, to put it mildly, that we feel new review guitars need a clean up and restring before we test them. These don't, either, of course, but we can't shake the feeling that these are instruments we've just purchased off eBay – in which case,

## You know it's all make-believe, but you can imagine the life of a guitar like this

the first thing we'd do is give them a clean up, restring and set them up. But no, you're good to go, certainly on the playability front.

On our V120, the fret ends don't quite have a boutique roundness to their ends – again, they feel and look like a competent refret from a few years ago. The fingerboard edges are nicely broken in, and here's a neck shape that sits between a bigger rounded 50s style and slimmer 60s. Extremely good. The V100's neck is fractionally smaller in width and depth, the neck back a little rougher and less smooth in feel.

Sound-wise, both our clones do the expected job with some panache. The V120 certainly doesn't harm the legacy of the guitar it's modelled on: that very direct, raw midrange voice is definitely here. No, it doesn't match the depth of the real thing nor its thumpy resonance, but it's in that ballpark; likewise, the range of the controls.

But even if you play with both controls full up, a Junior on full chat is quite something, as is this V120.

The V100 also has its own thing going on. The Old Guard Boot Camp units have to be one of the best pickup swaps you can make and drop us right into PAF-world with a bit of heat at the bridge. In combination with the construction, you'll struggle to get any ice-pick highs from the bridge pickup, while the Bigsby just seems to add a little more openness to the voice. Played pretty clean and loud, it's a very valid example of the style. Add some Marshall-y grit and things just get better; our reference Gibson Les Paul Classic now sounds a little underpowered with its Burstbucker 1 and 2 retrofitted 'buckers. There's a noticeable difference to the midrange too, with the Vintage being just a little more open; the real thing has a little more snarl. The Bigsby does get in the way of the neck pickup volume, but that's a trade-off we can live with. This is a hugely viable piece that not only feels a lot better in the hand than any standard V100s we've tried over the years but its sounds are on a completely different level, too. We'd take this on a gig as is with no hesitation.

## COMING OF AGE

It's all in the details – as ProShop manager, Nathan Sharp, explains

**“W**hat I've tried to show you is the different techniques that we're doing here,” Nathan tells us. “The V120 was done by one of our technicians who does the kind of ‘rat’ styles – so that's an acrylic white under-coat and a red acrylic top-coat. Then it's stripped back and aged. All the parts are individually aged by us as well. It might have been a bit more aged than you were expecting, but we wanted to really show the original sunburst under the red.

“I tackled the V100 in a different manner. The original goldtop is over sprayed – as is the headstock face – in nitrocellulose, but we obviously do a little work on the neck back. We have to put the ProShop decal on, so we have to spray that in as well. To do the whole guitar would probably push the final retail price to a full respray cost. Obviously, that's a lot of money so we decided to concentrate on the main visual: the top of the body and the headstock.

“One thing we like to do is to make it look like an old guitar, so, for example, where I've plugged the tailpiece stud holes, usually over time – however carefully you plug them – the finish will sink. So I've purposely made it look like that. We're really trying to make these look like they are 40 or 50 years old with the sort of character you would see on those guitars.

“There's probably been about six hours of work that's gone into that V100, but there are quite a few things on there that I wouldn't normally do to put into production as a ProShop. As I said, I wanted to show you and your readers the range of stuff we can do, so you've got all the whistles and bells on there, although normally I wouldn't put all of those on the one guitar. And, of course, the spraying is all about waiting – the drying time. So while it might be six or so hours' work in total, that's over two to three weeks because it's taken a couple of weeks for the lacquer to dry before I can craze it. It's so unpredictable how the finish will crack, too. We use a heat and freeze technique – and I was really happy with the way that one went – but, yes, it can certainly be unpredictable. Although, again, that's something I like. It means that each guitar has its own uniqueness.

“Some of the simpler guitars might only take two to three hours – maybe just changing a pickguard or changing pickups, and a good-quality setup. At the other end, it might be where I've hand-scored the finish cracks, which can take around eight hours. We try to keep it within those boundaries; I wouldn't want us to be spending two or three full days, that's just not practical for us here.”



Nathan Sharp heads up a team of four that works on the ProShop models

7. ProShop's Nathan Sharp tell us that these backplates are handmade from “a piece of brass that must have been around for I don't know how long,” he says. “It's not aged by us; it's just been aged over time. I cut them out and filed them to shape and, again, they just look in keeping with an instrument like this”



8. The curved body-line and offset heel are very different from Gibson's blueprint and make for a 'Junior' with improved top-fret access





These models reinforce how a lower-end guitar can really perform at a much higher level

**Verdict**

These are rather difficult guitars to evaluate. First off, they feel in a completely different league to any new Vintage guitar we've ever played and reinforce how a lower-end guitar, properly set up and revoiced, can really perform at a much higher level than its original price would suggest. Add in the comfort treatment for the necks, the great-sounding Bare Knuckle pickups and the vintage-y vibe created by the very believable ageing, and we're scratching our heads a little.

On the one hand, we've been conditioned that Vintage has lower-to-mid three-figure prices. Bearing in mind the work and parts cost, we're not saying these are overpriced – it's just that they seem expensive, don't they? Well, until you try to find an equivalent *new* guitar, that is. Or are we just badge snobs? Slaves to those classic brand names on our headstocks. Answers on a postcard, please.

It's down to personal preference, really. But on the presented evidence, we'd be happy to take these on any stage and leave our perhaps-more-valuable instruments to stay cased. Beaters with huge vibe and sounds that are perfectly good enough? We can only say yes. **G**

9. There's a white under-coat here with that pillar-box red top-coat. Both are acrylic but have very convincing age and wear. The pickguard is aged, too – only the pickup covers, on both, look a little new



**VINTAGE PROSHOP V120**

**PRICE:** £999 (inc gigbag)  
**ORIGIN:** China/Vietnam  
**TYPE:** Single-cutaway solidbody electric  
**BODY:** Mahogany  
**NECK:** Mahogany, glued-in  
**SCALE LENGTH:** 629mm (24.75")  
**NUT/WIDTH:** Graph Tech NuBone/43.2mm  
**FINGERBOARD:** Lignum Rosa, pearloid dot inlays, 305mm (12") radius  
**FRETS:** 22, medium jumbo  
**HARDWARE:** Graphtech ResoMax Sonic 1 wrapover bridge, Grover V138N tuners - aged nickel  
**STRING SPACING, BRIDGE:** 52.4mm  
**ELECTRICS:** Bare Knuckle Boot Camp Old Guard P-90 single coil w/ dog-ear cover, master volume and master tone  
**WEIGHT (kg/lb):** 3.55/7.81  
**OPTIONS:** Check the Vintage website  
**RANGE OPTIONS:** In the standard Vintage Reissued range, the V120 starts at £339; the aged Vintage Icon costs the same  
**LEFT-HANDERS:** Not this model  
**FINISHES:** Aged Red over Sunburst – acrylic aged top-coats



**PROS** A crackin' Junior-style build with real-world aged refinish – definitely worth a punt

**CONS** It basically remains a copy and not everyone will want to pay this money for a pimped East Asian chassis



**VINTAGE PROSHOP V100**

**PRICE:** £1,499 (inc gigbag)  
**ORIGIN:** China/Vietnam  
**TYPE:** Single-cutaway, carved top solidbody electric  
**BODY:** Mahogany with carved maple top  
**NECK:** Mahogany, glued-in  
**SCALE LENGTH:** 629mm (24.75")  
**NUT/WIDTH:** Graph Tech Tusq XL/41.7mm  
**FINGERBOARD:** Lignum Rosa, pearloid 'crown' inlays, 305mm (12") radius  
**FRETS:** 22, medium jumbo  
**HARDWARE:** Licensed Bigsby B70, locking roller-saddle bridge, Grover Roto-Grip Locking Rotomatic tuners – aged nickel  
**STRING SPACING, BRIDGE:** 50.5mm  
**ELECTRICS:** Bare Knuckle Boot Camp Old Guard humbuckers, 3-way toggle pickup selector switch, individual volume and tone controls for each pickup  
**WEIGHT (kg/lb):** 4.22/9.28  
**OPTIONS:** Check the Vintage website  
**RANGE OPTIONS:** In the standard Vintage Reissued range, the V100 starts at £369; the aged Vintage Icon versions at £419  
**LEFT-HANDERS:** Yes, the Reissued V100 lefty is available in 3 versions from £439; there's a single Icon model, in Lemon Drop finish at £529  
**FINISHES:** Aged Black over Goldtop – aged nitro-cellulose body top and headstock



**PROS** The best new Vintage guitar we've ever played: excellent vibe-y ageing and great sounds from those Bare Knuckle pickups

**CONS** Again, basically a pimped East Asian chassis that not everyone will want to pay this money for