

HAGSTROM HJ500 TREMAR & SWEDE TREMAR £599 & £625
ELECTRICS



PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOEY SESSIONS



Hagstrom HJ500 Tremar & Swede Tremar £599 & £625

With the new Tremar tailpiece, Hagstrom's electrics are now available with added wobble *by Paul Day*

Since Hagstrom electric guitars reappeared in 2007, the company has mainly concentrated on models that hark back to the brand's best-known originals. This ensures ample retro-flavoured individuality, an aspect recently enhanced by the addition of the Tremar tailpiece. The name revives the title of an early Hagstrom vibrato, but is now applied to the company's all-new interpretation of Bigsby's classic design. It's offered on a five-strong range of Chinese-made six-strings, with each identified by the new Tremar suffix.

HJ500 Tremar

The HJ500 archtop acoustic-electric model echoes the Hagstrom 'Jimmy', which was produced during the seventies in conjunction with the legendary American luthier, James D'Aquisto.

The latter was responsible for the ornate headstock, now employed across all of the new range. The Art Deco-ish tuners are another common feature, based on the D'Aquisto designed originals, although the new buttons are smaller.

Like its stablemates, the HJ500 employs a graphite nut, and its slippery properties suit

the Tremar version, while slots are equally spaced and cut for bare minimum action at the first fret.

The silky feeling, shallow radius bound fingerboard resembles ebony but, as on all modern Hagstroms, is a synthetic timber composite that the company calls Resinator Wood. Rounded corner pearl position blocks provide another link to the past, while all 22 medium-gauge frets are smoothly finished on the tops and ends.

Hagstrom necks of old were noted for their super-slimness, but the modern equivalents have adopted more mainstream measurements and a comfy broad-ish 'C'-profile, as can be felt on the HJ500's glued-in maple example.

The size and styling of the all-maple body is very similar to the original Jimmy. Construction is completely acoustic, with only a single support under the bridge. Binding all round contrasts the all-black finish and is also employed on the twin open-style f-holes.

Mounted on a hefty bracket, the curvy pickguard is true to traditional Jimmy form and made of thick plywood with heavily bevelled edges. But the

matt black finish looks odd against the gloss body and the end result seems austere and almost home-made, especially as it lacks the usual gold Hagstrom logo.

Metal-covered HJ50 humbuckers sit in black plastic surrounds that nicely match their angle to string slope, so it's a pity that neither pickup is actually mounted straight. The Gibson-style control configuration features twin volumes and tones, but with the three-way selector switch sited

on the right horn. Apart from the distinctive vibrato tailpiece, Tremar models come with Gretsch-like chromed control knobs, with that brand's influence extending to similarly styled metal switch tips.

Mounted on a freestanding wooden base, the Tremar bridge is actually a stock Wilkinson-designed, Korean-made component used on

The Rivals

HJ500 Tremar

The **Epiphone Wild Kat** (£399) is an acoustic-electric equipped with twin P-90s and a Bigsby vibrato. **Hutchins' Memphis** (£599) has a pair of humbuckers and a Bigsby. **Duesenberg's** excellent **CC** (£1,299) has less internal airspace and features this maker's own vibrato tailpiece.



The HJ500's bridge pickup offers single-coil-esque snap and woody low end



The Swede has a toppy acoustic tone, with the Tremar tailpiece contributing to some extra sprang

numerous other modern six-strings including the Taylor T3 (reviewed in issue 315). The six roller saddles are anchored securely and the complete unit can be locked into place on its twin posts.

The Tremar vibrato tailpiece is a sturdy re-working of the equivalent Bigsby, equipped with an integral string tension bar. Unfortunately, this style of vibrato is really not ideal for an all-acoustic body, as the front fixing screws are secured only to the thin top and the upward string pull could cause problems. The chunky tailpiece section features the Hagstrom badge and all parts are nicely chromed. The grooved tension bar does a good job of keeping strings correctly aligned after they anchor around the ridged rear-rotating spindle.

The flat-section arm starts off horizontal, before going through a 90° twist and terminating in a sizeable, Art Deco-style metal knob. Unlike Bigsby's version, there's no swing stop, so the arm can be moved over the strings. It sits quite high, but the shape suggests it's meant to be held, rather than pressed, so extra air underneath is a good thing.

The Tremar tailpiece provides that classic shimmer on chords and a gently expressive wobble for single-note work. The action is smooth and responsive, combining with the roller bridge and graphite nut for impressively stable tuning over a semitone bend down or up. Although the

latter isn't quite as successful as the former, it's something the real thing can't manage at all.

Sounds

Acoustic volume isn't as loud as you'd expect, with an upper mid-range tonality. Plugging in is also a surprise, as sounds are more Gretsch than Gibson.

The neck pickup is punchy and open-toned, while the bridge humbucker has an almost single-coil like snap and a woody low end. Combining the two brings a Gretsch Tennessean-type quality and although the Tremar tailpiece is a hefty piece of hardware, it seems to be adding to the guitar's overall airy character.

The HJ500's all-acoustic nature means feedback isn't hard to induce, while the tone pots provide a usefully gradual transition from country twang through to smooth jazz.

Swede Tremar

Back in the seventies, the original Swede was Hagstrom's major play for a share of Les Paul sales, becoming one of the brand's best-known models. Unsurprisingly, the reissue maintains the same styling and many other features.

The Swede also employed Jimmy D'Aquisto's headstock and naturally the new version does likewise, along with the updated Art Deco-type tuners.

As on the HJ500 the graphite nut is cut to a high standard, while the Resinator Wood fingerboard shares the same radius, but the black and white

layered binding is sharp edged. The block markers and frets are also the same, although the latter suffer from sharp ends. This could be down to fingerboard shrinkage, but as this is synthetic and immune to movement in theory, it implies inadequate attention at the production stage: a gripe we had with earlier Hagstroms.

Dimensions and profile of the glued-in mahogany neck follow those of the HJ500 and, unlike its Super stablemate, the standard Swede employs a Gibson-style scale length.

The carved-top, mahogany body is bigger all round than a Les Paul, but the cutaway is tighter, making upper end

The Rivals

HJ500 Tremar

The **Electromatic Pro Jet G5235T** (£399) offers an affordable interpretation of an original Gretsch Duo Jet, totting twin mini-humbuckers and a Bigsby vibrato.

Eastwood specialises in recreating retro electrics, including the **Airline Tuxedo** (£649), which boasts a Bigsby and numerous fifties-style features. Much further up the price scale, the **Starla** (£1,989) is the first Bigsby-packing **PRS** solid.



The Tremar tailpiece's distinctive Hagstrom livery really sets it apart



The ornate headstock was originally designed by luthier legend Jimmy D'Aquisto

operation a little cramped. The Swede Tremar is no lightweight, although it sits well, with some rear waist contouring increasing comfort. As yet, white is the only colour offered in the UK, contrasted by multi-layer black binding around the front edge.

Twin Custom 58 humbuckers partner a control circuitry that continues the Les Paul likeness, but with the addition of a toggle-type selector on the right horn. On the original Swede this was a simple standby switch, but now it's a triple-position type that performs filter functions, providing two different tonal choices plus centre bypass. Control hardware repeats the HJ500 format, as does the Tremar bridge, although here this is stud-mounted.

Offering equally consistent pitch return, the Swede's Tremar vibrato is correct, being Hagstrom's version of the flat-mount Bigsby, but with a more angular baseplate that's been made big enough to carry the company's crest.

Sounds

This Swede has a toppy acoustic tone, with the Tremar tailpiece contributing to some extra sprang. This balances the warmer tonality of the all-mahogany construction, ensuring cleanly defined delivery from the Custom 58 humbuckers. The neck position is thick-toned and meaty, while the bridge adds more bark and attack, with the centre selection supplying the best of both.

The filter switch offers enhanced mid or bass options, like a less subtle version of the PRS 'Sweet' switch. It helps with higher gain performance, although the Custom 58s keep things well under control

courtesy of an even and expressive response.

Verdict

The HJ500 Tremar combines Gibson and Gretsch elements in an appealingly individual instrument. The slim depth makes it more manageable than many big-bodied archtop electrics, while performance is more wide-ranging than the image might suggest.

The Swede Tremar obviously treads Les Paul territory, but in a more characterful way than some single-cutaway solids, with the Tremar tailpiece again adding another dimension in terms of looks, feel and sound.

As with the others in the Tremar series, these Hagstroms revisit this maker's past in respectful fashion, with updated performance combining effectively with the vintage qualities offered by the company's new vibrato. **G**

The Bottom Line

HJ500 Tremar

We like: Looks; sounds; vibrato performance
We dislike: Wood pickguard; incorrect vibrato tailpiece
Guitarist says: A good-looking acoustic-electric that offers individuality and a surprisingly versatile level of overall performance

Swede Tremar

We liked: Sounds; vibrato performance; character
We dislike: Weight; sharp fret ends
Guitarist says: A classy and individual alternative to many more-obvious single-cutaway six-strings



Hagstrom HJ500 Tremar

PRICE: £599
ORIGIN: China
TYPE: Single-cutaway hollow body semi-acoustic
BODY: Canadian maple
NECK: Maple, glued-in
SCALE LENGTH: 629mm (24.75-inch)
NUT/WIDTH: Synthetic/42.5mm
FINGERBOARD: Bound wood composite with pearloid block position markers
FRETS: 22, medium
HARDWARE: Roller bridge and separate Tremar vibrato tailpiece; Hagstrom tuners – all chrome-plated
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 50.5mm
ELECTRICS: Two Hagstrom HJ-50 humbuckers; two volume controls; two tone controls; three-way toggle pickup selector switch
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.5/7.7
OPTIONS: None
RANGE OPTIONS: Tremar Deluxe-F Special; Tremar Swede; Tremar Super Swede; Tremar Viking Deluxe
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISHES: Vintage sunburst or black (as reviewed)
Hagstrom UK
0870 143 6736
www.hagstrom-guitars.co.uk

Test results

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

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★



Hagstrom Swede Tremar

PRICE: £625
ORIGIN: China
TYPE: Single-cutaway solid electric
BODY: Mahogany with carved mahogany top
NECK: Mahogany, glued-in
SCALE LENGTH: 629mm (24.75-inch)
NUT/WIDTH: Synthetic/42.5mm
FINGERBOARD: Bound wood composite with pearloid block position markers
FRETS: 22, medium
HARDWARE: Roller bridge and separate Tremar vibrato tailpiece; Hagstrom tuners – all chrome-plated
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 50.5mm
ELECTRICS: Two Hagstrom Custom 58 humbuckers; two volume; two tone; three-way toggle pickup selector switch; three-way toggle tone switch
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 4.50/9.9
OPTIONS: None
RANGE OPTIONS: Tremar Deluxe-F Special; Tremar HJ500; Tremar Super Swede; Tremar Viking Deluxe
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISHES: White only in UK

Test results

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

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★