

in the same axe? Tres cool! The '59 had significant clean-tone bark through a Dynacomp, but dirty, it really opened up. This is a true retro-rocker.

Through a Bogner Alchemist and an extensive pedalboard, the Belmont showed its diversity. Though clean tones are crisp and clean, more impressive is the guitar's ability to dirty

up; overdriven, the lipstick-tube pickups have a cool garage-band sound that works great for '70s-style rock and punk, while the Duncan simply soars. Cover-band players will love the flexibility to capture early-'60s twang to Allman-type drive.

Still, if clean tones are more your thing, fear not – lipsticks and ma-

hogany equal clean pristine tones. Funk guitar parts cut through a mix with a glass-like presence, and the '59 works well for modern country as well as blues and rock.

The Richmond Belmont is a cool new take with vin-

tage ideas. Its throwback appearance conjures images of basking in the California sun and grooving 'til sunset. It's also a new take on the single/single/humbucker pickup configuration, offering something different, sonically. – **Sean O'Bryan Smith**

Fullerton Tone, Kalamazoo Feel

CP Thornton Fusion Guitars

CP "CHUCK" THORNTON has spent decades learning the craft of lutherie; he built custom basses until Dana Bourgeois picked him to help with the fretwork on his esteemed line of acoustics in the early 1990s.

After spending three years carving necks, levelling fretboards, and doing fret jobs with Bourgeois, he made the jump to building fine violins and cellos with Jon Cooper. Helping build high-end stringed violins fueled his desire to return to guitar building, which he did back in 2000 with Dana Bourgeois in Pantheon Guitars. Then, in '04, Thornton made the leap onto his own, building archtops and solidbodies.

Many of Thornton's innovations were born from his days as a repairman, including his radiused headstock design. After repairing many broken necks on Gibson Les Pauls and 335-style guitars, he borrowed from architecture and devised a double-radiused headstock to improve the strength of his guitar necks. He says the design resulted in better coupling, better tone, and a more roadworthy instrument. Thornton's first foray was in electric archtops, but he recently introduced a line of bolt-neck guitars, including the Fusion.

With subtle hints to inspiration by Leo Fender, Thornton sent us two variations of the Fusion – the first a maple-neck with three single-coil pickups, the second with a rosewood fretboard, two single-coils, and a humbucker. Both use Thornton's radiused headstock and the longest neck/body joint you've likely ever seen; the end of the neck joint is under the vibrato backplate! The headstock has three tuners on each side and is angled so as not to need string trees.

Fusion SSS

The three-single-coil Fusion arrived

in classy white over alder, with an attractive tortoiseshell pickguard. The neck is quartersawn rock maple, with both a birdseye-maple fingerboard and headstock overlay. Frets are of the 6105 medium-jumbo variety, and it measures 1¹¹/₁₆" wide at the bone nut. Pickups are Lindy Fralin Vintage Hot units, the bridge employing the optional base plate. Controls are a five-way switch, master Volume, master Tone, and a Blend control that gives new color to the normal five-way selections and allows access to the two outside pickups together, as well as all three pickups combined. The Fusion is easy to play due to both its neck-joint angle (4¹/₂ degrees) and headstock angle (13 degrees). Setup was fantastic, and all five positions on the selector offered well-balanced, bell-like tones. Selecting the middle pickup and plugging into a Fender Twin produces beautiful Hank Marvin tones. The guitar worked exceedingly well with all drive pedals, and never lost its rich tone. The Gotoh vibrato and tuners worked flawlessly.

Fusion SSH

The SSH arrived in a classic dark honey burst over a light alder body with a mint green guard. Single-coils are the same Lindy Fralin Vintage Hots, while a 9.2k bridge humbucker uses asymmetrical coils, which Fralin says makes a clearer sound and stronger tapped tones. The quartersawn maple neck has a rosewood fretboard, 1¹¹/₁₆" nut width, and a two-way adjustable truss rod. Frets are jumbo 6100 fret wire, and the vibrato and locking tuners are again made by Gotoh.

Wiring on this Fusion includes a five-way selector and separate Volume and Tone controls for the single coils and the humbucker; the humbucker's Tone is a push/pull tap that can be used

with the neck pickup, while the tapped bridge can be added to the middle pickup for the classic Strat two-back-pickup sound.

CP THORNTON FUSION GUITARS

Price: \$2,425 (SSS), \$2,500 (SSH)

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Compared to the maple-neck SSS, the SSH offers a tighter, more focused sound. Its larger frets and rosewood fretboard contributor, but it's also the two pieces of alder showing their characteristics. This instrument was much more willing to be cranked through a loud amp or have its tone manipulated by drive pedals. In situations where another guitar might get lost or flab out, the SSH delivers strong fundamental tones that cut through. And again, it boasted impeccable setup work and well-balanced tones from position to position. The controls allow every tone you could possibly desire. This is a muscular, sinewy axe.

Most hybrid instruments are just that – an amalgamation of disparate features that really don't go together. But Thornton has succeeded in melding Fender tone with the ease of playing associated with guitars having neck and headstock angle. If you're looking for Fullerton tones with true Kalamazoo playability, this is your beast. – **Zac Childs VG**

