

GEAR Bench Test



PRS DGT and Mira

TESTED BY MATT BLACKETT AND ART THOMPSON

LATELY, IT HAS BEEN A BIT TOUGH KEEPING UP WITH THE output of the PRS factory. The renowned maker debuted nine guitars in 2007—as well as a few signature models—and also dropped a fall surprise on everyone by introducing the brand-new Mira at an “Experience PRS” event held at the company’s Stevensville, Maryland headquarters. We reviewed the company’s three new affordable SE models—the Custom Semi-Hollow, One, and Paul Allender—in the October 2007 issue, and, this month, we’re bringing you the Mira and the David Grissom Trem, or DGT. Stay tuned for upcoming reviews on the Johnny Hiland and Mark Tremonti signature models.

DGT

Guitar slinger David Grissom (John Mellencamp, Joe Ely, Dixie Chicks) and Paul Reed Smith have been working together a long time. Grissom got his goldtop PRS Standard back in '87, and he has played approximately 1.5 million





The DGT sports a gorgeous flame top and classic PRS bird inlays.

gigs on it. Over the years, he and Smith talked at length about guitar construction, and many of the changes they discussed—a beefier neck, thicker body, thinner headstock, lower-mass tuners—dovetailed perfectly with what Smith was learning from his mentor and ex-Gibson president Ted McCarty. It all went into the design of the PRS McCarty Model, which was introduced in 1994. Since that time, many

McCarty's have joined the PRS family. The DGT (David Grissom Trem) featured here, while not a McCarty in name, is inspired by the McCarty Trem, and it incorporates even more of the improvements Grissom and Smith have been obsessing over.

At first glance, the DGT is pretty much what we've come to expect from PRS—meaning it's flawless and gorgeous. The brushed nickel

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SPECS PRS, (410) 643-9970; prsguitars.com		
	DGT	MIRA
PRICE	\$3,600 retail/\$2,600 street (\$4,610 retail/\$3,227 street as tested with 10"-top and bird inlays)	\$2,560 retail/\$1,792 street
NUT WIDTH	1 ¹¹ / ₁₆ "	1 ¹¹ / ₁₆ "
FRETBOARD	25"-scale rosewood	25"-scale rosewood
NECK	Mahogany with DGT carve	Mahogany
FRETS	22 jumbo	24 jumbo
BODY	Mahogany with carved maple top	Mahogany
PICKUPS	David Grissom Treble and Bass humbucker	Mira Treble and Bass humbuckers
CONTROLS	Two Volume, master Tone (push/pull coil split on Tone control), 3-way selector switch	Volume, Tone, 3-way selector switch, mini toggle (splits coils)
BRIDGE	PRS Trem	PRS stoptail
HARDWARE	PRS 14:1 Phase II low-mass locking tuners (grommet style)	PRS 14:1 Phase II low-mass locking tuners (grommet style)
FACTORY STRINGS	D'Addario, .011-.049 with unwound G	D'Addario, .010-.046
WEIGHT	8.24 lbs	6.5 lbs
KUDOS	Flawless construction. Great ability to blend pickups. Impressive sustain.	Cool vintage-style look. Lightweight. Excellent playability and sounds.
CONCERNS	None	Plastic tip on the pickup selector pops off easily.

pickup covers look beautiful, and the plastic tuner buttons give off an old-school Kalamazoo vibe. You need to play the DGT to really grasp the Grissomization, however. The neck carve, for instance, is indeed chunkier than that of previous PRS guitars, and it feels supportive and meaty. It also undoubtedly contributes to the DGT's punchy amplified tones.

"The neck is to David's specs," elaborates Smith, "which is actually a little smaller carve than PRS' standard wide fat, and includes much taller frets."

The jumbo frets are perfect, and an excellent complement to the Grissom-approved .011s that this thing ships with. It all adds up to a solid, powerful feel before you ever plug in. When I did plug in, I cranked the DGT through an Engl Invader 100 and a Marshall JVM. It instantly delivered warm, articulate tones on either pickup, clean or dirty. The bridge pickup, in particular, has a ringing, open quality that responds amazingly well to where I pick on the string—bright and snappy close to the bridge, dark like a church bell over the fretboard. Any guitar

will do this to a degree but this guitar *really* does it.

"We wanted to capture the elusive character and magic of a great—and they are not *all* great—PAF," says Grissom, "where there is clarity in all the strings, while still having warmth on the top end. We used the pickups on my '59 ES-335 as the benchmark. I think we got it right."

Combining the two pickups in the middle position was pleasant, but here's where one of the DGT's coolest features comes into play. McCarty's typically have a master volume control, but the DGT has a separate volume knob for each pickup. When you combine this with Paul Smith's almost maniacal insistence on great-sounding, smooth-operating volume pots, you get a two-humbucker guitar with stunning blendability. Seriously—with both pickups on, you can clearly hear the difference when you roll one volume down to 9, then 8, then 7, and so on. Again, you can approximate this on any similarly wired guitar, the DGT just does it better. I found myself living in the middle position exclusively, blending the two pick-

ups to taste. The benefits of this control layout represent a big deal for the guitar's namesake, as well.

"Having separate volume controls was really important to the development of this guitar," says Grissom. "I watched a Led Zepelin DVD from an early concert in London, and seeing Jimmy Page get all the tones from the first few Zeppelin albums just by working his volume knobs made me think, 'We've got to do this. We're missing so much with just one volume control.'"

None of this should come as a shock, really. Grissom is an incredibly tasteful player and a consummate professional. PRS (the company and the man) have embodied the highest standards and a commitment to excellence for years. Combine the two and this is exactly what you get—that and an Editors' Pick Award. —*Matt Blackett*

MIRA

PRS is a company that introduces new models only when it's sure it has something exciting to offer, and the debut of the new Mira (\$2,560 retail/\$1,790 street, as tested

GEAR PRS

with optional bird inlays; \$2,200 retail with standard dot inlays) is particularly noteworthy as it is being pitched as the retro ride of the PRS line. Designed to play, sound, look, and feel like a vintage solid-body, the Mira sports a flat-topped mahogany body with cutaways that are reminiscent of those on a 1960 Gibson Les Paul Special. Along with new exposed-coil humbuckers, the controls on our powder-blue review instrument are also a departure for PRS, as they consist of Volume, Tone, 3-way pickup selector, and—yep—a mini-toggle for coil splitting. The cool looking clear knobs are flat sided to make them easy to grip with sweaty fingers, and their black skirts also allow the numbers to stand out more clearly.

The Mira's mahogany set neck has a chunky, McCarty-style heel, a wide/thin profile (the "regular" shape is also available), and a 25"-scale, 10"-radius rosewood fretboard adorned with abalone inlays. The 24 jumbo frets are polished to a satiny finish, and they have rounded crowns and smoothly beveled ends. The PRS Phase II low-mass

locking tuners are fitted to the painted headstock, and this is where you also find a white plastic cover for the trussrod that's made from the same three-ply material used for the stylish pickguard. A polished aluminum PRS stoptail compensated bridge grips the strings at the opposite end, providing not only a solid anchor to transfer the vibrations, but also a wonderfully comfortable place to rest the palm of your hand. It all adds up to give the U.S.-made Mira a very streamlined feel—one that's enhanced by its feathery weight of 6.5 lbs.

Played through a variety of tube amps—including a vintage Fender Super Reverb, a Cornford Carrera, and three new 100 watt heads from Carvin, Engl, and Marshall—the Mira sounded great for everything from blues to full-bore metal. The pickups are wound on the hot side, and they offer a balanced presentation of sparkling highs, a firm bottom, and punchy mids. Activating the split-coil function enhances the clarity and definition (albeit at reduced output), allowing for very crisp and open tones in the dual-pickup setting, while also provid-

ing for more detailed neck pickup and spankier bridge pickup sounds than I'm used to hearing from a PRS. In full 'bucker mode, the Mira sounded great for everything from bluesy riffing though the Super Reverb to rocking out with a sustaining overdrive setting on the Cornford amp to aggressive metal-style grinding through all of our high-gain amps. Along with delivering the low-end mass and treble definition that modern rock styles demand, the Mira has a sweet midrange sound akin to what you get from a humbucker-equipped SG—so don't be surprised if you find yourself unavoidably summoning Cream-era Clapton tones when playing this guitar. With its low action and fast-playing neck, the Mira is definitely a speed machine, but even those who don't specialize in warp-drive playing will appreciate how easy this guitar is to get around on. Beautifully built and finished, the Mira would be a great choice for young rockers, as well as veteran players of Paul Smith's maple-topped guitars who simply want to enjoy what his latest design has to offer. —Art Thompson 