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Epiphone Crestwood

'60s Un-Gibson Solidbody

By ERIC C. SHOAF

Gibson’s acquisition of Epiphone in 1957 presented a tremendous challenge to guitar designers and marketers at the company. One challenge was to design a new solidbody instrument that could be produced at the Kalamazoo factory using existing tooling and production lines. Another was to make it visually distinct from Gibson’s Les Pauls.

The answer? The Crestwood, the Wilshire, the Coronet, and the Olympic – all-new solidbodies introduced in 1958.

In these, Gibson was still using leftover parts from the original Epiphone company. But those crafty designers were working overtime, and Gibson’s mini-humbucker – a true double-coil pickup the same size and shape as the “New York” pickups used in this line – quickly supplanted the inferior-sounding Epis. The Crestwood was introduced with a sunburst finish, which gave way to cherry in ’59 and at first had 1 3/4″ thick bodies just like their Gibson LP Junior and Special kin.

The new Epis were quickly slimmed down to 1 3/8″ for ’59, then dubbed Crestwood Custom.
Epiphone's mid-'60s solidbody line included this Epiphone Crestwood in Sunset Yellow and the Olympic in Olympic Green. Here the duo is backed by a '60s Sears Silvertone Solid State 100 amp. All photos: VG Archive/Mike Tamborrino.

Screaming '60s options included the batwing headstock (which emulated the letter E), chrome-capped "bonnet" knobs (a la Gibson), and custom Sunset Yellow color. Photo: VG Archives.

The '60s Epiphone solidbodies featured the same set-neck design and quality construction as Gibson models and provided Gibson a second outlet for sales. The body style chosen in '57 for the Crestwood foretold of changes to Gibson solidbodies, and market acceptance of the Crestwood and other Epi solidbodies undoubtedly influenced Gibson's SG model. Epi solidbodies were discontinued in 1970, when all Epiphone models began to be sourced from manufacturers outside the U.S.

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A'61 Crestwood Custom with three-on-a-side headstock. Photo: VG Archives.

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