

Review: A riff on robotics with self-tuning guitar

November 25 2009, By JOSH L. DICKEY , AP Entertainment Writer



In this undated product image provided by Gibson USA, the Gibson Dark Fire guitar is shown. (AP Photo/Gibson Guitars)

(AP) -- New cars have been tuning themselves for the better part of two decades now, so it should feel less impressive that Gibson has built a guitar that can smoothly do the same.

And yet when you strum the Dark Fire for the first time, causing its

tuning pegs to spin like the ghost of Stevie Ray Vaughan is twirling them over your shoulder, your "wow" knob goes to 11. The perfect pitch it attains in about three seconds is a nice bonus, too.

Released in the past year, the Gibson Dark Fire - basically a tricked-out Les Paul [guitar](#) - is a refinement of Gibson's "[robot](#) guitar" series with self-tuning capabilities. What distinguishes the Dark Fire is its upgraded self-tuning system with additional factory presets (allowing up to 16 alternate tunings). That means you can get more sets of chords out of the guitar without spending much time retuning it.

The Dark Fire also has an onboard tone control that does reasonable impersonations of various guitar tones, with everything from the Texas blues to heavy metal. The Dark Fire is costly, with a suggested retail price of \$3,477, but Gibson points out that because of its ability to produce so many sounds, the Dark Fire can take the place of multiple guitars.

The guitar's digital guts are powered by a rechargeable battery that takes juice through the input jack and should last long enough for an extended gig. And other than the kaleidoscopic colors bursting in LED glory from the interface knob, the thing looks pretty much like your standard Les Paul - until you get a much closer look at the carbon-fiber parts where wood used to be.

The only annoying thing about the Dark Fire is the way the interface knob operates: You pull it out of the body until it "clicks" in place to turn the feature on. Then you turn it to the setting you want and push it in to engage the tuner. Only problem is, the amount of pressure needed to get things started is just shy of what it takes to push the knob back in completely, so it takes some practice to keep from inadvertently switching the guitar off.

It's not clear how many Dark Fires have been sold. But Gibson is still riffing on the concept: Another version of the robotic guitar, the Dusk Tiger, is due to be released Dec. 7.

On the Net: <http://bit.ly/DYyP>

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Citation: Review: A riff on robotics with self-tuning guitar (2009, November 25) retrieved 15 August 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2009-11-riff-robotics-self-tuning-guitar.html>

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