



Words Michael Astley-Brown | Photography Olly Curtis

FENDER PLAYER SERIES ROUND-UP

Say goodbye to the Standards and hello to the Player Series as the biggest name in guitars revamps its mid-priced made-in-Mexico line



At this point in time, most players are familiar with Fender's aspirational path for guitar players: you start with a Squier, then upgrade to a made-in-Mexico Standard model, before making your way into 'it will be mine' American-made territory. It's a stairway to six-string heaven that's courted guitarists for as long as most of us care to remember. But times have changed: good guitars are more affordable than ever, and many electrics hovering around the £500 mark can more than cut it as pro gigging and recording instruments.

And perhaps that's why, for 2018, Fender has given its mid-priced made-in-Mexico line a comprehensive overhaul. That means the Standard Series is no more;

let us introduce you to the Player Series. While four new finishes are on offer (Sonic Red, Buttercream, Sage Green Metallic and the turquoise-ish Tidepool) and the use of pau ferro fingerboards rather than rosewood to avoid CITES wrangles, there's more to these new models than meets the eye – namely, all-new Alnico pickups, while the F logo that adorns the neck plate is a nice touch, too. Best of all, the new models sell for roughly the same price as the Standards before them.

It all means that each guitar in the Player line makes a pretty compelling prospect on paper, and makes us all the more eager to get to grips with The Big F's latest takes on three of its longest-serving models. So, without further ado, let's put 2018's Strat, Tele and Jaguar through their paces...



FENDER PLAYER TELECASTER

Old faithful gets a makeover

The Alnico V Tele single coils on the Fender Player Telecaster pack a serious punch

£549



AT A GLANCE

BODY: Alder
NECK: Maple
SCALE: 648mm (25.5")
FINGERBOARD: Maple
FRETS: 22
PICKUPS: 2x Player Series Alnico V Tele single coils
CONTROLS: 1x volume, 1x tone, 3-way pickup selector switch
HARDWARE: 6-saddle string-through-body Tele bridge, synthetic bone nut
LEFT-HANDED: Yes
FINISH: Black (reviewed), 3-Colour Sunburst, Tidepool, Butterscotch Blonde, Polar White, Sonic Red, Polar White
CONTACT: Fender EMEA 01342 331700 fender.com

The humble Telecaster remains the guitar world's most enduring workhorse, and its Mexican-built 2018 incarnation is in rude health. Key additions this time around include a 22nd fret, all-purpose 241mm (9.5") fretboard radius (which appears across the range), a set of old-school bent-steel saddles and Alnico V Tele single coils. Besides this maple-fingerboarded spec, you can also get a pau ferro board for an extra tenner, while the hot-rodded dual-humbucker Tele HH comes in at £579.

The Player Tele instantly wins points for its satin maple-finished neck, which handles like a dream. It makes a welcome change from the over-glossed necks that once populated Fenders in this price range and below, and it's hard to imagine a guitarist who wouldn't get on with the comfortable modern C-shaped neck. The fit and finish is spot-on, and the only gripe we

can level is down to personal preference: players who rest their hand on the bridge while picking may wish to swap out those bent-steel saddles for standard blocks, although tonehounds will cite an increased treble snap as a reason for the originals to stay put.

Plug in, and the sonic heft is immediate: the Alnico V magnets employed here lend this Tele some serious punch. That bridge single coil is one of the most well-rounded Tele bridge pickups we've heard at this price point – neither brash nor overloaded in the low-end, it's perfectly balanced, ideal for Keef-style open G chordal riffage and big, open chords with a touch of drive. The neck, meanwhile, provides that mellow,

jangly texture that Jeff Buckley put to such good use, but give it some gain and it will do big Tom Morello riffs to a tee – after all, the Rage Against The Machine guitarist has employed a 90s-era Mexican Tele for well over a quarter of a century now. The underused middle position is wonderfully glassy, too, and it's not a world away from a Strat – it will certainly cop a decent Hendrix/SRV solo tone in a pinch.

Of course, the trade-off of using hotter Alnico V magnets means the sounds won't satisfy the ears of fickle vintage enthusiasts, but that's not who this guitar is for: anyone after an easy-to-play Tele that delivers a clutch of classic tones and handles gain like a champ won't be disappointed.

THE TELE INSTANTLY WINS POINTS FOR ITS SATIN MAPLE-FINISHED NECK



There is little to fault on the build quality of the Fender Player Stratocaster

£549



FENDER PLAYER STRATOCASTER

Smooth as Buttercream



AT A GLANCE

BODY: Alder
NECK: Maple
SCALE: 648mm (25.5")
FINGERBOARD: Pau ferro
FRETS: 22
PICKUPS: 3x Player Series Alnico V Strat single coils
CONTROLS: 1x volume, neck/middle tone, bridge tone, 5-way pickup selector switch
HARDWARE: 2-Point Synchronized Tremolo, synthetic bone nut
LEFT-HANDED: Yes
FINISH: Buttercream (reviewed), Polar White, 3-Colour Sunburst, Black, Tidepool, Sage Green Metallic, Sonic Red
CONTACT: Fender EMEA 01342331700 fender.com



When it comes to its pride and joy, Fender really goes to town, and the Player Strat is no exception. Like the Tele, a pau ferro 'board is available for an additional £10, while the 22nd fret comes for free, but there are also HSS, HSH pickup configurations, as well as the flame maple-topped Plus Top and HSS Plus Top, which – appropriately enough – top out the range at £719. All of them pack an updated two-point vibrato design, plus three new Alnico V single coils.

Our traditionally spec'd review model is in the new Buttercream finish – the jury's out over whether it looks like a more saturated Vintage Blonde or freshly dolloped custard, but we've warmed to it. Like the Tele, the satin neck provides a slick playing experience, while there's little to fault with the build quality other than some slightly jerky tuners.

There's a hugely usable set of tones across the five-way selector, which recall Fender's fat Texas Hot single coils and respond beautifully to gain, and treble loss is minimal when rolling back the volume knob. The bridge pickup, which can be weedy on mid-priced Strats, is rich yet cutting – and if it's still too spiky, the pleasingly responsive tone knob will enable a fairly precise treble cut. That may not sound like much, but it's actually a big deal, as the two tone knobs are wired thusly: tone 1 handles neck and middle, while tone 2 adjusts the bridge. It's an incredibly useful arrangement, and one you won't find on vintage Strats, which offered no

THERE'S A HUGE USABLE SET OF TONES ACROSS THE STRAT'S FIVE-WAY SELECTOR

control over the bridge pup. And while the neck single coil is lacking a little presence, it positively shines in combination with the middle for some serious quack attack.

Then there's that new two-point vibrato, which is one of the smoothest-operating systems we've encountered at this price point, with no problems returning to pitch. The familiar 'loose arm in the socket' problem still rears its head, but it's nothing a bit of tape around the thread can't fix. By their very nature, Strats will always pay homage to the past, but this particular edition packs tones that span the decades and bring the format bang up to date.



FENDER PLAYER JAGUAR

Cat got your tone?



AT A GLANCE

BODY: Alder
NECK: Maple
SCALE: 610mm (24")
FINGERBOARD: Pau ferro
FRETS: 22
PICKUPS: Player Series Alnico III Jaguar humbucker (bridge), Alnico II Jaguar single coil (neck)
CONTROLS: 1x volume, 1x tone, 3-way pickup selector switch, coil-split switch
HARDWARE: 6-saddle vintage-style adjustable bridge with floating tremolo, synthetic bone nut
LEFT-HANDED: No
FINISH: Black (shown), 3-Colour Sunburst, Tidepool, Sonic Red
CONTACT: Fender EMEA 01342 331700 fender.com

The Jaguar has always been a curio among Fender's range, and its Player edition is one of the line's more intriguing offerings. Rather than the traditional SS layout, Fender has spec'd an Alnico 3 humbucker in the bridge and Alnico 2 single coil in the neck. The plot thickens with that diddy plastic switch on the upper horn, which splits the humbucker for wiry single-coil tones. It's styled after the original's underused rhythm circuit, which is wisely absent here – we'd rather have a coil-split any day of the week.

The tweaks don't end there: a Mustang bridge replaces the original Jag setup, which was prone to popping strings with aggressive or fingerstyle playing. Returning is the floating vibrato and trademark 609mm (24") short scale length, resulting in one of the better-spec'd Jags we've seen.

For anyone who's never played a short-scale guitar, we implore you to

The Jaguar is one of the Player line's more intriguing offerings

£599



get your hands on one: they're a breeze to play, especially with this satin finish. The same goes for the pau ferro fretboard. While some early examples could be a little patchy, the grain on our review model is not dissimilar to rosewood, so there's certainly no feeling short changed here.

Engage the neck single coil and have a play with the floating vibrato, and there's a very familiar feel – that widescreen, crystalline single-coil sound is present in abundance. For those unfamiliar, Jag pups aren't as snappy as a Strat or Tele's, but make an excellent base for effects. That bridge humbucker pays homage to Kurt Cobain's modified Jag, and although the Alnico 3 magnets can't come close to the output of the ceramics in

Cobain's DiMarzio Super Distortion, it can approximate that *Teen Spirit* snarl.

The utility of the coil-split could be called into question, however. The split humbucker is pretty thin with clean tones, and is noticeably quieter than the neck, while it yields a hollow tone in the middle position, which is unlikely to see much use. Given the pickup height on our review model was as close to touching the strings as we dared to take it, we wonder whether a higher-output 'bucker might have been better suited here. Nevertheless, the split certainly comes into its own with dirt, as it provides a handy preset gain cut. In fact, every position finds a purpose in this context, and it's clear that's this Jaguar's natural habit: rolling in filth.

WIDESCREEEN, CRYSTALLINE SINGLE-COIL SOUND IS PRESENT HERE IN ABUNDANCE

FINAL VERDICT

Which T-style is the right one for you?

The Player Series marks a real commitment to the mid-priced market from Fender, particularly given there are no unpleasant price hikes to contend with – although we would argue that you’d expect an included

gigbag at this price. Of course, there are more versatile guitars available in this territory, too, but that’s what Fender’s Deluxe series is for, and for anyone wanting the real deal – and we know there are a lot of you – these instruments represent a marked

improvement on the Standard line. The Jaguar, true to form, is an acquired taste, but the Strat and Tele are absolute no-brainers, thanks to a range of punchy, usable tones and trouble-free playability, which is sure to inspire players of all levels.

FENDER PLAYER TELECASTER



SUMMARY	FEATURES	★	★	★	★	★
	SOUND QUALITY	★	★	★	★	★
	VALUE FOR MONEY	★	★	★	★	★
	BUILD QUALITY	★	★	★	★	★
	PLAYABILITY	★	★	★	★	★
	OVERALL RATING	★	★	★	★	★

FENDER PLAYER STRATOCASTER



SUMMARY	FEATURES	★	★	★	★	★
	SOUND QUALITY	★	★	★	★	★
	VALUE FOR MONEY	★	★	★	★	★
	BUILD QUALITY	★	★	★	★	★
	PLAYABILITY	★	★	★	★	★
	OVERALL RATING	★	★	★	★	★

FENDER PLAYER JAGUAR



SUMMARY	FEATURES	★	★	★	★	★
	SOUND QUALITY	★	★	★	★	★
	VALUE FOR MONEY	★	★	★	★	★
	BUILD QUALITY	★	★	★	★	★
	PLAYABILITY	★	★	★	★	★
	OVERALL RATING	★	★	★	★	★