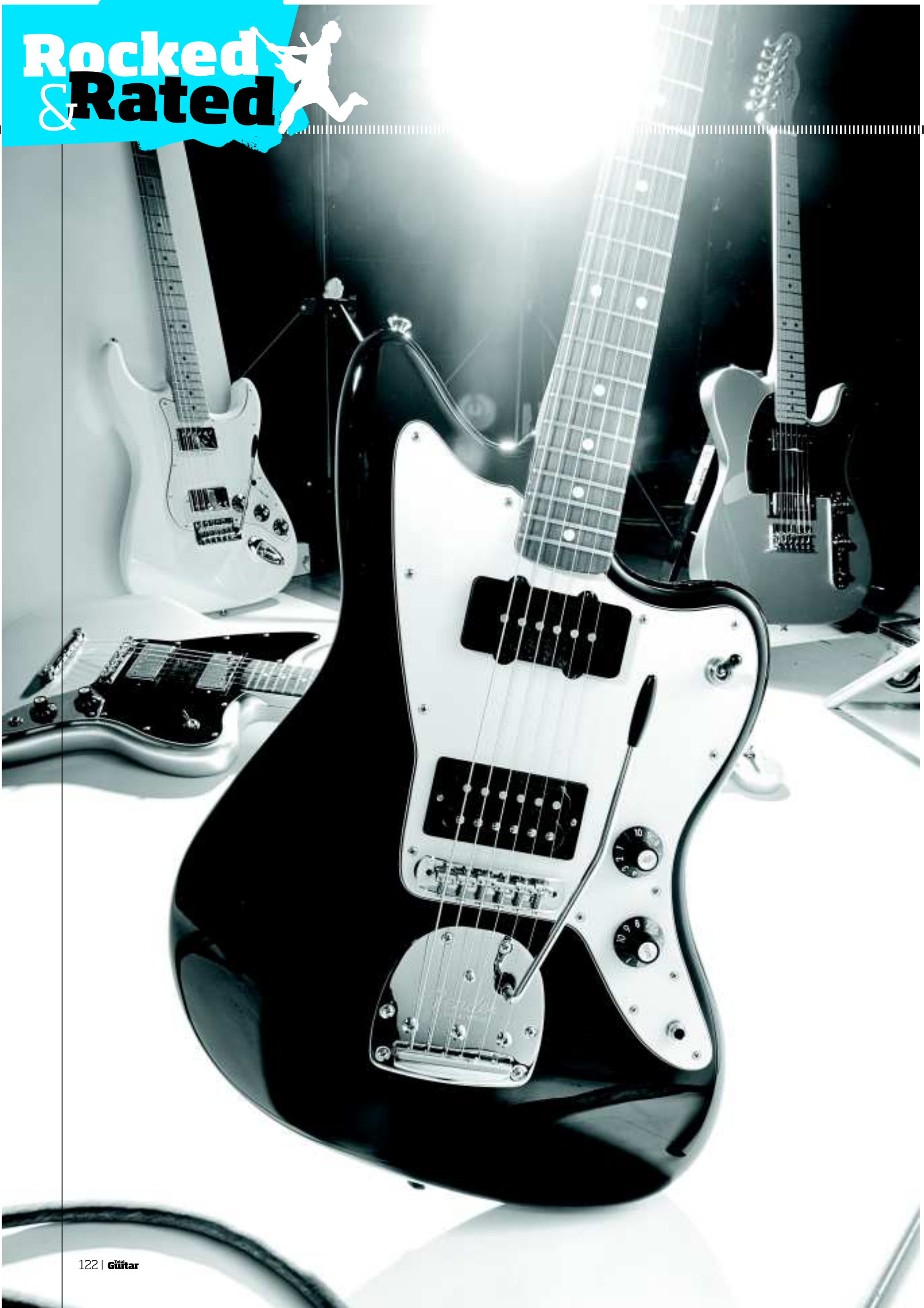
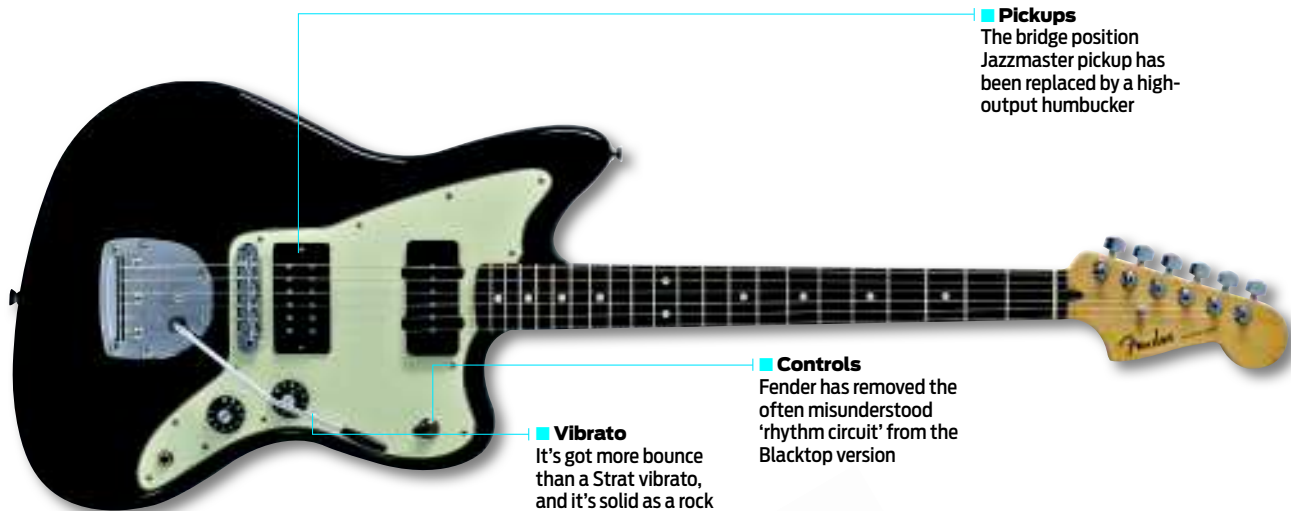


Rocked & Rated





Pickups
The bridge position Jazzmaster pickup has been replaced by a high-output humbucker

Controls
Fender has removed the often misunderstood 'rhythm circuit' from the Blacktop version

Vibrato
It's got more bounce than a Strat vibrato, and it's solid as a rock

Fender Blacktop Jazzmaster HS

£599



Turn the page for more reviews of the Blacktop series from the TG team!

The classics get hot-rodded with pokey humbucking pickups for Fender's new Blacktop series. First up, the Jazzmaster...

The Jazzmaster's popularity has fluctuated since its birth in 1958. First, it was ignored by the jazz players it was designed for, then it was adopted by the surf bands of the 60s, before being revered (along with the Jaguar) by the 90s alt rock set. In recent years, the Jazzmaster has seen a resurgence thanks to signature models for Sonic Youth, Dinosaur Jr's J Mascis and Elvis Costello. Die-hard Fender freaks may want to look away now, though, as each of the four new 'classic' models in the Blacktop series have been modded to meet "modern player[s]' demands for a thick and heavy sound".

The Blacktop (so-called because of the series' black amp knobs) Jazzmaster features the iconic off-set body shape, but is rid of the original's 'rhythm circuit'. The other major change is the bridge pickup, which has been replaced with a Fender Hot Vintage Alnico humbucker. If you're a Strat fan who's never played a Jazzmaster, the larger off-set body might take some getting used to. Leo originally designed this shape to be

played while seated, but it also hangs comfortably on a strap. The Blacktop's neck defies the guitar's position as a vehicle for shoe-gazing types with funny haircuts. Its nine-and-a-half-inch radius makes it snug, and it's surprisingly speed-friendly.

The neck position is home to a Duncan Designed version of the Jazzmaster pickup. Tonally, it sounds like a singlecoil that's been comfort eating – it's fatter, with a higher output than a standard singlecoil and less honk than a Strat. Dig in and it brings out extra spike, allowing it to still sound Fender-y when you need it to; play it clean and you'll have to fight the urge to pull out your best surf licks; chuck it through some fuzz and you'll get a cloudy grunge sound. To our ears, it reacted best to open chords through a valve overdrive.

It's the bridge pickup that's been billed as the main event here, though. Yes, it's a humbucker, and it adds the modern dimension that Fender had hoped, but don't expect it to rival the low end chunk of a Gibson Les Paul. The alder body reacts to the pickup with a pumping mid range and less

sustain, which is perfect for cutting through when distorted.

Conclusion: On paper, this guitar is second only to its Strat counterpart in terms of versatility. The two pickups complement each other well enough to cover most tonal bases, and while purists will, of course, miss the rhythm circuit, we've lost count of the amount of artists who have gaffa-taped the switches or removed them from the circuit entirely. Fender has thought of the two most popular Jazzmaster mods, and executed them with style. In reality, it works.

Stuart Williams

At a glance

Fender Blacktop Jazzmaster HS

BODY: Alder
NECK: Maple
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood
FRETS: 21 medium jumbo
SCALE: 25½"
PICKUPS: 1x Jazzmaster singlecoil (neck), 1x humbucker (bridge)
CONTROLS: 1x volume, 1x tone, three-way pickup selector
HARDWARE: Chrome
LEFT-HANDED: No
FINISH: Black (pictured), 3-Color Sunburst (£649)
CONTACT: Fender 01342 331700
WEB: www.fender.com

SUMMARY

For: Modern update to an alternative classic

Against: No individual tone controls

★★★★☆

TG says... A new dawn for Fender electrics



'Bucker off: Fender says goodbye to traditional singlecoils with its new series

"THE NECK'S RADIUS DEFIES THE GUITAR'S POSITION AS A VEHICLE FOR SHOE-GAZING TYPES. IT'S SURPRISINGLY SPEED-FRIENDLY"



Fender Blacktop Jaguar HH



£599

At a glance

Fender Blacktop Jaguar HH

BODY: Alder
NECK: Maple
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood
FRETS: 22 medium jumbo
SCALE: 24"
PICKUPS: 2x Hot Vintage Alnico humbuckers
CONTROLS: 1x volume, 1x tone, three-way pickup selector
FINISH: Silver (pictured), Black

Those in the 'plug in and play' school are going to love this beefed-up version of the short-scale indie/grunge guitar staple. Two alnico humbuckers and the stripped down wiring (a basic three-way toggle switch) mean

that what the Jaguar HH loses in tonal versatility it gains in, er, 'crunchability'.

Design-wise, there are a few slightly niggling decisions: the position of the toggle-switch on the pickguard makes sense, but the left to right (as opposed to

up and down) movement seems at odds with the easy-access ethos. Also, while there are no qualms with the Adjusto-Matic bridge, we would have preferred the option of a vibrato.

Still, it's the sound that counts and the Jaguar HH undoubtedly

delivers. Thick chords and wailing leads are wonderfully lively, well balanced and acquire a delicious crunch when the tone knob is in its upper limits. It may not be the only guitar you'll ever need, but that won't stop you wanting it.

Matthew Parker

Fender Blacktop Stratocaster HH



£599

At a glance

Fender Blacktop Stratocaster HH

BODY: Alder
NECK: Maple
FINGERBOARD: Maple (or rosewood)
FRETS: 22 medium jumbo
SCALE: 25½"
PICKUPS: 2x Hot Vintage Alnico humbuckers
CONTROLS: 1x volume, 2x tone, five-way pickup switch
FINISH: Sonic Blue (pictured), Black, Candy Apple Red

Of all the Blacktop range, the Stratocaster is arguably the least exotic. Since Hendrix's demise, the Strat has morphed from sex object into the stringed equivalent of an accountant (named Bob, from Accrington).

'Strats are just plain dull' seems to be the consensus.

Well bollocks to that, says this beefed up Blacktop, replete with overwound alnico humbuckers, a palm-full of neck and frets edging on the side of jumbo. This guitar will appeal to real

musicians. Not only real ones, but '4 real' ones, too – the kind who like grunge and carving slogans into their own body parts. Gigging musicians will love the versatility its humbuckers and five-way switch provide (you get the best singlecoil Strat

tones and some useable 'bucker sounds), while the indie/alt types will simply drool at the vintage paintjob and quirky knobs. Either way, while its street price is less than 500 sheets, this guitar represents excellent value.

Stephen Lawson

Fender Blacktop Telecaster HH



£599

At a glance

Fender Blacktop Telecaster HH

BODY: Alder
NECK: Maple
FINGERBOARD: Maple (or rosewood)
FRETS: 22 medium jumbo
SCALE: 25½"
PICKUPS: 2x Hot Vintage Alnico humbuckers
CONTROLS: 1x volume, 1x tone, three-way pickup selector
FINISH: Silver (pictured), Black, Candy Apple Red

Tele fans might question the wisdom of replacing the traditional singlecoil configuration with high-output humbuckers, but this Blacktop does it with great success. The tone from the pickups is sweet and (in the

neck and 'in between' positions) surprisingly retains some of the singlecoil Tele's twang at times. There's just a slightly fuller, more rounded sound here and that slab body gives plenty of sustain.

As you'd expect, the neck pickup has more mid range bite

and will function for soloing. Dial in a clean or medium crunch sound on your amp and this guitar delivers sweet tones suited to Texas blues, classic rock and jangly indie. The bridge pickup gives a great up-tempo country lead tone, too. Our review model

had a silky-smooth high gloss finish maple neck: coupled with its low action across the entire fretboard, this makes the Blacktop an eminently playable guitar that encourages you to let rip with your fastest licks.

Chris Bird