

FENDER MODERN PLAYER SERIES £442, £442, £526 & £526
ELECTRICS/BASS



All Mod No Cons

As Fender squeezes more juice out of its classic designs to attract new punters, the Modern Series range mixes old with new. We give four new models a spin... **by Ed Mitchell & Roger Newell**





Fender Modern Player Series Marauder, Jaguar, Telecaster Bass & Jazz Bass **£442, £442, £526 & £526**

What we want to know

- 1 So, more new Fenders that look familiar...**
Yes, Fender is a master at reinventing its past. These guitars are made in China and are aimed at Fender 'virgins', although they should also be of interest to Fender diehards.
- 2 What's a Marauder?**
It was a planned model that never made it into production back in the mid-sixties. Not to be confused, of course, with a 1970s Gibson model.
- 3 Who's gonna play 'em?**
The Modern Player series might be intended to attract younger players into the Fender fold, and on price alone they look rather appealing. But factor in some very un-Fender-like features and we reckon more than a few will find their way into more experienced players' collections. That Marauder and the simplified Jaguar have our full attention...

If you're bewildered by the sheer number of pimped out guitars and basses that Fender has released in the past year, well, the influx isn't quite over yet. Following in the wake of the recent Blacktop and Pawn Shop Series models, Fender has now unveiled its highly affordable Chinese-made Modern Player Series, consisting of four electric guitars and three basses.

The reason for all this activity is simple: new blood. If you own a Strat, Tele, Precision, Jazz or anything else with Leo's surname on the headstock, well, they've already got you hooked. It's the newbies that Fender is hoping to attract. But don't take that to mean that there's not something interesting in the Modern Player range for you if you're one of the Fender faithful. In fact, there's one classic guitar in this latest lineup that has been 45 years in the making...

Modern Player Marauder

If you're up on your Fender trivia you'll know the Marauder model designation has been knocking about since 1965. Originally proposed as a top-of-the-line model with four pickups hidden under its

scratchplate, manipulated via a shedload of switches and knobs, the guitar was quickly redesigned with three exposed single-coils. Fender went as far as adding the Marauder prototype to its '65 catalog, but the model never made it into production and was history by

1966. Now, a mere 45 years later, the Marauder is back... albeit in a more simplified format.

While the new Marauder's slim 'C' profile bolt-on maple neck, classic 25.5-inch scale and vintage-style 'synchronized' vibrato are textbook Fender, there are a couple of surprises lurking on its spec sheet. For a kick-off, the Marauder is the first Fender with a koto wood body. It's a light-coloured African wood that often ends up as a veneer on furniture. Whatever, the weight, tone and sustain of koto feels comparable to alder in our opinion.

An even bigger surprise is the guitar's Triplebucker bridge pickup. Paired with a Jazzmaster single-coil in the neck position, the Triplebucker might look a bit bonkers –

The Marauder's Triplebucker might look a bit bonkers – gimmicky even. In actual fact it's a smart bit of kit



Triplebucker. Nothing more need be said on the matter





gimmicky even. In actual fact it's a smart piece of kit. Fender has squeezed the humbucker and two single-coil format of a hot-rodged Strat onto the Marauder's compact scratchplate. Flicking through the guitar's five-way switch you get the Triplebucker in its humbucking mode; all three coils on; the inside coil of the Triplebucker on its own; that inside coil combined with the P-90-style neck pickup; and the neck pickup solo.

Modern Player Jaguar

Winking this latest Jaguar derivative from its cardboard box reveals a large CBS-era headstock, then a slim 'C' profile bolt-on maple neck, a rosewood fingerboard, a couple

of P-90-style single-coil pickups, a tune-o-matic-style bridge and fixed tailpiece, a pair of Jazz bass knobs and then... a bloomin' Strat jackplate! We'd love to get hold of the blighter at Fender who insists on putting Stratocaster jackplates on guitars that ain't Strats, and send them to bed without any supper. It just looks wrong on this guitar; like furry dice hanging from the rearview mirror of an E-Type Jaguar.

Some of you may argue that this stripped-down guitar isn't a true Jaguar anyway. We hear you; and the unconventional

choice of a mahogany body, in place of traditional alder, confirms that you may well have a valid point. Fender would likely respond that the guitar's unmistakable silhouette and short 610mm (24-inch) scale length make it a classic Jag to the bone. Plus, it has 'Jaguar' on the headstock. That seals the deal really. Just remember that, again, this is designed to appeal to Fender virgins, not purists.

Sounds

Plugging the Marauder in reveals another big surprise.

Switching from the Triplebucker's two-coil humbucking mode to its three-coil setting you might expect an increase in output. You'd be wrong. The humbucker mode is infectiously bright and punchy and works great for heavy riffs and power chords. Switch to the triple-coil setting and the output decreases slightly leaving you with a warmer tone that's perfect for clean rhythm work and crunchy old school rock riffs. The tonal palette is completed by some glassy single-coil sounds courtesy of the Triplebucker's extra coil



The Jaguar offers no sonic surprises at all. And that's a good thing, as you get three fat-sound P-90 tones

The Rivals

Modern Player Marauder & Jaguar

The **Eastwood Ichiban** (£549) offers a similar level of retro pawnshop prize appeal to the Modern Player Marauder. Loaded with two mini-humbuckers, the Ichiban comes over like a cool collision between a Fender Jazzmaster, Mosrite Ventures model and a Teisco Del Rey K2-L. If you like the Modern Player Jag's Les Paul Special bits (the mahogany body and twin-P-90s, natch) you might fall for the affordable delights of the **Vintage VR100LM** (£289). Its mahogany body and glued-in neck, combination bridge/tailpiece and P-90 pickups place it in the same postcode as Gibson's iconic original.



The shape is familiar but everything else on the Jag is very unconventional



and the neck position P-90. If you play blues, rock, surf, rockabilly, jazz, country, even metal, the Marauder will see you alright.

By way of contrast, the Modern Player Jaguar offers no surprises at all. And that's a good thing. You get three fat-sounding P-90 tones that thrive on clean and overdriven settings. This is not a guitar for the gain junkies and shredders among you, but it'll work for blues players, punks and just about anyone else.

Modern Player Telecaster Bass

This is a handsome beast indeed and was Fender's first attempt to bring its classic basses bang up to date. When originally launched back in the

seventies, Fender used the original P-Bass template from the fifties and raised the game by fitting it with a pair of imposing humbuckers. This was design morphing in a truly delightful fashion, yet the Telecaster Bass has been somewhat elusive over the intervening years. So this is definitely the right time for a comeback and it's a wonderful bass to behold and play. This butterscotch blonde finish is particularly attractive and evokes a nostalgic feeling, but the body is fully contoured so is far more comfortable to play than those early Precisions.

Modern Player Jazz Bass

First impressions of this make you wonder, why haven't we

seen a Jazz with these useful mods incorporated into it before? Well, the truth is we have seen JB's with this feature set previously, but never at such a pocket friendly price. Everything that you'd expect from a standard sixties Jazz Bass is here, but with a pair of double-sized Jazz humbucking pickups for a really great look and the promise of bigger fatter sounds. Essentially we don't want the look of the Jazz to be messed about with but we feel these pickups and modern bridge unit are perfectly acceptable and, as we find, the sounds support the notion.

Sounds

On the Telecaster Bass the 'split-coil' pole screw adjustment on the pickups

reveals the 'hidden' P-Bass nature of these meaty humbuckers. They produce a far more throaty element to the sound than is associated with regular Fenders, as we found with the original version of this lovely bass. Generally the neck pickup is dominant (which is a good thing for a bass) so to get the best blended sounds you need the tone control favouring the treble end. Only then is that delightfully honky edge revealed and it's totally unique to this pickup configuration on a Fender.

It's a different scenario with the Modern Player Jazz Bass, however, as everything is pretty much the same sound as you would expect from the regular configuration only there's more of it! The humbuckers add

The Rivals

Modern Player Telecaster Bass & Jazz Bass

The **Bass Collection Californian** (£645) owes its persona to the mighty Rickenbacker courtesy of its distinctive pickup blending, volume and tone controls for both pickups and even chequered binding to the body. More unusual is the **Burns Brian May Bass** (£715), which offers the look of Brian's guitar but with a pickup combination that mixes Burns with Gibson, a short scale, bound mahogany body and a sound all of its own. **Yamaha's BB1024X** (£899, in tobacco brown sunburst) has also been given a recent upgrade with new pickups and bridge, plus through-body stringing.



The Wide Range humbuckers produce a more throaty sound than most Fender basses



increased solidity to the overall sound and more generous blending. The tightness associated with standard single-coils is still there if you wind back the volume controls a tad, but running flat out gives extra body and projection, particularly when blending and, let's face it, that is the name of the game with a Jazz.

Verdict

Both of the Modern Player guitars offer excellent build quality and features at a low price point. The Jaguar for one is a good blues and classic rock machine that should appeal to all but the most staunch of

Fender purists. The Marauder, however, is the pick of the litter. It has the enduring retro appeal of a Mustang or Jaguar combined with the easy playability and tonal versatility of a hot-rodged Strat. If any guitar can steer Fender virgins away from the competition it's the Marauder. But don't let the newbies have all the fun. It took 45 years for the Marauder to get here. You owe it to yourself to give it the once over.

And there's plenty to appeal, too, from both of these basses. Again we are impressed with the quality and little evidence of cost cutting in looks, sounds or overall feel. This Jazz offers

a meaner edge to the sound, yet still produces those classic tones, while the sound of the Telecaster Bass is so different from the general Fender bass tonality that it has the potential to convert the uninitiated – or indeed existing Precision and Jazz Bass owners – so is really worth trying.

All in all, the Modern Player Series is a great idea and beautifully executed. They might be aimed at Fender newbies, but there's plenty to appeal to more experienced players too. And with the world economy in meltdown the lowly prices seem rather attractive – to all of us! **G**

The Marauder is the pick of the litter. It has retro appeal combined with easy playability and tonal versatility



The Jazz Bass's humbucking pickups give classic J-Bass projection – but more of it!

The Bottom Line

Fender Modern Player Marauder

We like: Cracking range of tones; excellent playability; retro looks

We dislike: Some may regard the Triplebucker pickup as a bit of a novelty item

Guitarist says: The Fender classic that never really was, now 'is'. Fender virgin or not, everyone should test-drive this cool alternative to the usual Strat models

Fender Modern Player Jaguar

We like: Fat P-90 tones coupled with great playability

We dislike: That Strat jackplate just looks weird...

Guitarist says: It's not the prettiest representative of the Jaguar family, but this Modern Player edition pumps out some great P-90 tones

Fender Modern Player Telecaster Bass

We like: Great build and the fatter, rather un-Fender-like tonality

We dislike: Once you understand it, nothing

Guitarist says: A fine retro-looking Fender bass with huge humbucking tones. What's not to like?

Fender Modern Player Jazz Bass

We like: Traditional J-Bass styling; excellent build; enhanced 'big J' tones

We dislike: Nope, not a single thing

Guitarist says: A classic looking Jazz Bass with more power under the hood



Fender Modern Player Marauder

PRICE: £442.80
ORIGIN: China
TYPE: Offset double-cutaway solidbody electric
BODY: Koto
NECK: Maple, bolt-on
SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5 inches)
NUT/WIDTH: Synthetic bone/42mm
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood with MOP dot inlays, 241mm (9.5-inch) radius
FRETS: 22, jumbo
HARDWARE: Chrome Strat 'synchronized' vibrato and vintage-style tuners
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 52mm
ELECTRICS: Fender Triplebucker (bridge), Modern Player Jazzmaster single-coil (neck), master volume, master tone, five-way pickup selector blade switch
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.3/7.2
OPTIONS: See finishes
RANGE OPTIONS: The Modern Player Telecaster Thinline Deluxe (£442.80), is a semi-hollow single-cut with dual soapbar single-coils. The modern player Telecaster Plus (£442.80), is a solidbody Tele with humbucker at bridge (with mini-toggle coil-split switch), Strat single-coil in middle position and covered Tele neck pickup — both Teles have maple 'boards
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISHES: Black (as reviewed), Lake Placid blue
Fender GBI
01342 331700
www.fender.com

Test results

Build quality	★★★★★
Playability	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★



Fender Modern Player Jaguar

PRICE: £442.80
ORIGIN: China
TYPE: Offset double-cutaway solidbody electric
BODY: Mahogany
NECK: Maple, bolt-on
SCALE LENGTH: 610mm (24 inches)
NUT/WIDTH: Synthetic bone/42mm
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood with white dot inlays, 241mm (9.5-inch) radius
FRETS: 21, medium jumbo
HARDWARE: Nickel adjust-o-matic bridge and fixed tailpiece, vintage-style tuners, chrome Stratocaster oval jackplate
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 52mm
ELECTRICS: Two Fender MP-90 single-coils, master volume, master tone, three-way pickup selector toggle switch
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.2/7
OPTIONS: See finishes
RANGE OPTIONS: See Modern Player Marauder spec check
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISHES: Two-colour chocolate burst (as reviewed), transparent red, transparent black

Test results

Build quality	★★★★★
Playability	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★



Fender Modern Player Telecaster Bass

PRICE: £526.80
ORIGIN: China
TYPE: Offset double cutaway passive solidbody bass
BODY: Alder
NECK: Maple, 'C' shape, bolt on
SCALE LENGTH: 864mm (34 inches)
NUT/WIDTH: Synthetic bone/42.3mm
FINGERBOARD: Maple with black dot markers, 241mm (9.5-inch) radius
FRETS: 20, medium jumbo
HARDWARE: Nickel/Chrome-plated Heavy Duty vintage-style bridge with brass saddles, open-geared tuners
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 20.5mm average (centres)
ELECTRICS: Two Wide Range humbucking Precision bass pickups, two volume controls and master tone
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 4.35/9.6
OPTIONS: See finishes
RANGE OPTIONS: The unique Modern Player Jaguar Bass (£442.80) sports P/J pickups and a black block-inlaid maple fretboard
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISHES: Two-tone sunburst, butterscotch blonde (as reviewed)

Test results

Build quality	★★★★★
Playability	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★



Fender Modern Player Jazz Bass

PRICE: £526.80
ORIGIN: China
TYPE: Twin-cutaway, solidbody, passive bass
BODY: Alder
NECK: Maple, 'C' shape, bolt-on
SCALE LENGTH: 864mm (34 inches)
NUT/WIDTH: Synthetic Bone/39mm
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood, white dot inlays, 241mm (9.5-inch) radius
FRETS: 20, medium jumbo
HARDWARE: Nickel/Chrome-plated Heavy Duty vintage-style bridge with brass saddles, open-geared tuners.
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 20mm average (centres)
ELECTRICS: Dual-humbucking Jazz bass pickups, two volume controls and master tone
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 4.75/10.5
OPTIONS: See finishes
RANGE OPTIONS: See Telecaster bass spec check
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISH: Three-tone sunburst, Olympic white (as reviewed), black transparent

Test results

Build quality	★★★★★
Playability	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★