



Squier '51, Tele Custom, Tele Custom II & Standard Jagmaster

£139, £199, £199 & £229

SQUIER '51
PRICE: £139.99
ORIGIN: Indonesia
TYPE: Offset double-cut solidbody
BODY: Basswood
NECK: Maple, bolt-on
SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5-inch)
NUT/WIDTH: White plastic/42mm
FINGERBOARD: Maple, 241mm radius
FRETS: 21 medium jumbo
HARDWARE: Hardtail S-Type bridge, control plate, Squier-logo tuners and two string trees, all chrome
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 53mm
ELECTRICS: One 'hot humbucker', one Strat-style single-coil, master volume, three-way rotary selector, coil-split for 'bucker on volume pot
WEIGHT (kg/lbs): 3.25/7.2
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISHES: Black, vintage blonde, two-colour sunburst (as reviewed)
Fender GBI
01342 331700
www.fender.co.uk

A quartet of ultra-affordable instruments, including one that mixes three classic designs into a single model *by Simon Bradley*

Squier has to be one of the very few brands that everyone has played, owned or considered and, unlike another 'sister' brand we could mention, levels of build quality have, for the most part, remained consistently acceptable.

Over the last 18 months, Squier has captured imaginations with the Series 24 and the more metal-influenced guitars of the Showmaster range, yet the most enduring Squier models are always likely to be those steeped in Fender-associated history. Here we look at four new additions to the Vintage Modified series that show their roots with pride...

'51

That said, this example is actually a brand new model that combines traits from the Strat, Tele and, interestingly, P-bass. And it's due to the influence (and debut year) of the latter instrument that the guitar has been dubbed the '51.

The very first P-basses were produced in October 1951 to be subsequently promoted by the likes of 'where are they now?' file occupants Shifte Henri and Wade Ray, and facets of this classic four-stringer that have made it on to the '51 include the unmistakable single-ply scratchplate – fixed by 11 rather than seven screws,

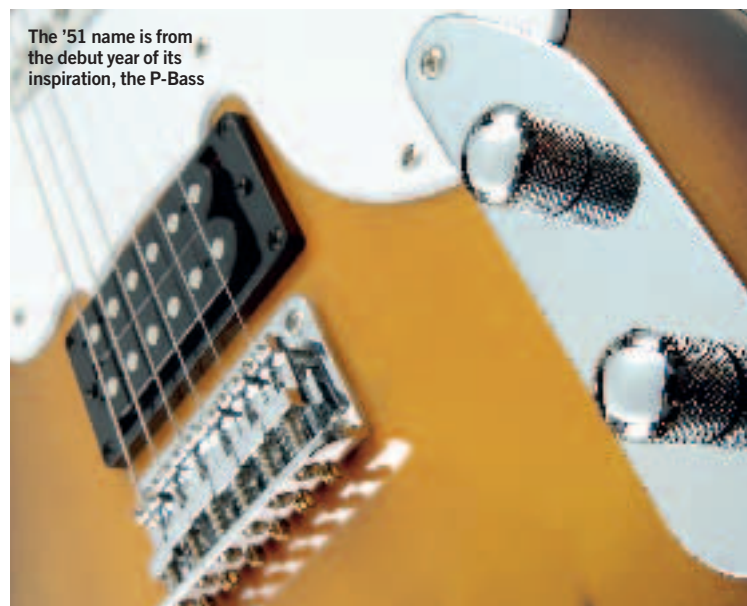
fact fans – and the truncated two-knob control panel.

The two-piece basswood body, however, is all Stratocaster and it's certainly worth mentioning that it hasn't been routed for three single-coils under the scratchplate, proving this is a specific design – without doubt a creditable move on Squier's part. Electrics are courtesy of an uncommon H/S configuration, comprising a Squier 'hot' humbucker and Strat single-coil, and the mix of cover colours also echoes the P-bass vibe, albeit probably unintentionally.

Another cool feature is the second knob as, instead of it simply being a straight-forward tone control, it's actually a three-way rotary pickup selector that combines the coils in the usual T-type manner – the volume pot doubles as a push/pull coil-split too.

The headstock gives away the third of the '51's classic influences, the good old Telecaster, and the neck itself is hewn from a single piece of maple, almost unheard of at this end of the market. The wood, which is of a decent grade too, has been lightly finished with a matt polyurethane and given a vintage tint that, thankfully, isn't of the lurid orange variety that can be found on certain reissues.

The 21 frets are slightly more substantial than those of a standard Telecaster and are a little on the proud side too, especially at the edges. However, this is in no way obstructive to a feel that is pure contemporary Fender and we have to say that although this and all Squier guitars



The '51 name is from the debut year of its inspiration, the P-Bass



PHOTOGRAPHY KATHARINE LANE SIMS

With both pickups mounted straight to the '51's body, the initial tone is certainly woody and organic, even though the humbucker is a little unsubtle

come out of the box strung with .009-.042-inch gauge, this particular '51 was set-up perfectly.

SOUNDS: With both pickups mounted straight to the body, the initial tone is woody and organic, even though the humbucker is a little on the unsubtle side, especially when played cleanly. Of course you get your money back in the rock arena as, with a nice big overdrive, all the harmonics and overtones are pushed to the fore to give a cutting, aggressive and very satisfying crunch.

SQUIER '51	TEST RESULTS
Build quality	★★★★★
Playability	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★
■ WE LIKED The top new look and old school vibe	
■ WE DISLIKED The bridge humbucker can be a little brash	

The rotary's middle setting combines all three coils in parallel to offer a tone similar to a Strat's fourth position, although with added beef and body upping the chunk factor to ensure big chords are full and breezy. With more gain, the tone here is similar to The Black Crowes' best moments, while flicking to the single-coil gives you a ticket to SRV-land: the striving urgency nicely offset by middly girth. Add the coil-split and positions one and two offer yet more possibilities. We have another three guitars to look at, so let's just say that the '51 is a winner in all areas and leave it at that.

Tele Custom & Custom II

As the only difference in spec between these two ultra-cool Tele Customs is the choice of pickups, we'll check both out together. At first glance, the use of the word 'Custom' here might prove a little confusing. It clearly refers to the 1972

version, made famous by Keith Richards, but it was actually the Telecaster Deluxe, also introduced in 1972, that featured a pair of Fender humbuckers and the unashamed Gibson Les Paul control panel, albeit with a Stratocaster headstock. The first version of the Custom, released way back in 1959, was a fancier version of the Standard Tele, featuring double edge body binding and a selection of classy finishes. However, Squier Tele Customs these are and, with a substantial agathis body, thick black finish and big scratchplate, these are very attractive guitars indeed. The Custom is loaded with a pair of Squier covered humbuckers that differ slightly from the 'wide range' units fitted to '72 originals both in size and look – one row of six polepieces rather than two offset rows of three – while the Custom II features two Duncan Designed P-90 single-coils. A familiar combination of three-way toggle sited on the upper horn plus a volume and tone control for each pickup allows for an easily predictable level of control and we're reminded

The rivals

'51	
Yamaha PAC311MS	£299
Godin SD	£349
Fender Cyclone from	£579

The cheaper version of Mike Stern's signature Yamaha is a strange bedfellow here, but the vibe is similar to that of the '51. It has an H/S configuration with a great feel and, although an example may prove difficult to track down, it's certainly worth it. Godin's SD is admittedly a further distance away from the '51 but, with a similar mix of modern and vintage livery we're happy to recommend it as we've yet to try a Godin we didn't like. The Cyclone is yet another mix of classic Fender features including several from the Jazz bass and, as well as an H/S brace of Fender pickups, offers a vintage trem and a small-scale body into the bargain



SQUIER TELE CUSTOM

PRICE: £199.99

ORIGIN: Indonesia

TYPE: Single-cut solidbody electric

BODY: Agathis

NECK: Maple, bolt-on

SCALE LENGTH:

648mm (25.5-inch)

NUT/WIDTH: White polycarbonate/42mm

FINGERBOARD: Maple, 184mm radius

FRETS: 22, medium jumbo

HARDWARE: Hardtail T-type bridge, Squier standard tuners and two string trees – all chrome

STRING SPACING,

BRIDGE: 53mm

ELECTRICS: Two Squier covered humbuckers, two volume and two tone controls

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.6/7.9

OPTIONS: Squier's Standard Tele goes for £199.99, while the even more affordable Affinity Tele retails at £139.99. Fender's '72 Tele Deluxe from the Classic Series costs £629.99

LEFT-HANDERS: No

FINISHES: Black only

SQUIER TELE CUSTOM II

As Tele Custom except...

PRICE: Also £199.99

ELECTRICS: Two Duncan Designed P-90 single-coils

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.5/7.7

FINISHES: Black, blonde

→ that, in Fender's entire history, never have they come so close to emulating classic features from their Kalamazoo rival as they did with the Tele Deluxe.

Be prepared for a treat when you pick either of these Teles up, as their necks are simply out of this world, especially when you consider their measly prices. The spec of each is supposed to be exactly the same, from nut width and provision to feel and fret style, but they seem to fill the hand in slightly different ways. The Custom II

SQUIER TELE CUSTOM	TEST RESULTS
Build quality	★★★★★
Playability	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★

■ **WE LIKED** The vibe is sheer Keef Richards – 'nuff said

■ **WE DISLIKED** Shame about the wobbly toggle switch

has a very slightly deeper 'C'-shape as well as there being a genuine flaming to the single piece of neck maple. There's no vintage hue to either neck here, which consequently allows the natural honey colour to be attractively evident.

Feel is all down to an individual's perception of course, but we must emphasise that both Customs play superbly and, again, have been set-up to perfection: Squier has even used the original curly font for the 'Custom' logo. All in all, not much is missing here and we can even forgive the Custom's wobbly toggle switch.

SOUNDS: It's unlikely that either would be used for heavy rock styles

and, with a smooth drive rather than an out and out distortion, the mid-powered humbuckers really do sound very nice indeed. Agathis is, apparently, similar in tone to mahogany and the Custom certainly produces a fat rhythm tone that remains more than clear enough for most realistic requirements. The neck humbucker is silky and warm with tonal possibilities ranging from jazz to Slash-style solo sections. The best description is to think of an SG that needs to go on a diet and you're just about there.

In general, P-90 pickups have a more streamlined appeal and remember that, as they're single-coils, they'll buzz like crazy at ultra-high gains. We

Be prepared for a treat when you pick either of these Teles up, as their necks are simply out of this world, especially when you consider their measly prices

The choice between Custom and Custom II is essentially: humbuckers or P-90s?





Both Teles' necks are outstanding for the price

SQUIER TELE CUSTOM II TEST RESULTS

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

■ **WE LIKED** A genuinely astonishing neck of the highest quality all round

■ **WE DISLIKED** P-90s aren't to everyone's taste... unfortunately!

One thing is undeniable: Squier is going to sell container-loads of each of these models. The RRP of each is well below what we'd be prepared to pay

reckon that a more restrained style is best suited to the always beautiful P-90 tone and, for blues, indie and even bed-wetting pop, you could do a great deal worse than the Custom II. For cleaner styles, the three available settings are similar to positions one, three and five on a Stratocaster, with similar amounts of spank, sparkle and warmth. Of course, as P-90s have a wider coil the intrinsic tones are more middly than those of a traditional single-coil and, in tandem with the thick agathis body, the Custom II has a tone all of its own.

Standard Jagmaster

The intermittent legacy of Fender's 'shape' guitars was brought to the fore with the release of Kurt Cobain's Jagstang in 1995, which combined the Nirvana star's favourite bits of the Jaguar and Mustang into a single entity.

Since then, these guitars have enjoyed an almost underground reputation but, as even Jaguar owners aren't certain what that model's plethora of switches, dials and chrome plates actually do, there has always been a market for more straightforward guitars inspired by the vintage classics.

This Jagmaster is a new and improved version of past models

dedicated to offering the Jaguar/Jazzmaster experience without the associated head scratching and, to this end, the Squier offers the historically correct 24-inch scale with a smoother body shape, Strat-style vibrato and a just two controls. Both Jags and Jazzmasters have been produced loaded with various types of pickup since their respective introductions in 1962 and 1958 and, as the Jagmaster's name suggests, this instrument strives to include the simplest facets of both. It hails from China rather than Indonesia, which should lead to a slightly higher overall standard.

The shorter scale notwithstanding, this does appear to be a rather

cramped guitar at a casual glance, an illusion created by the wide body and Strat-style neck. In reality, there's no compromise to be made when actually playing, either stood or seated; however you hold it, your pick is right where it needs to be.

Feel-wise the Jagmaster's neck is easily the most vintage of the four guitars here, demonstrating an almost sixties-style 'V'-shape (yes, we know the Squier website extols the guitar's 'C'-shape: it's not!) and the slight vintage tint really sets off the classic big headstock and gold logo to a tee. What's more, two Guitarist cohorts who own real deal Fender Jaguars confessed to actually preferring the

The rivals

TELE CUSTOM

Peavey Generation EXP	£129
Samick Formula FA2	£299
Fret-King Country Squire Semi Tone	£999

The Peavey is another H/S/S Tele-a-like with an even better price than these Squiers: with a body shape resembling a Tele/Ibanez Jem hybrid, there aren't many cooler guitars with which to begin your career. Samick's FA2 has a Duncan Designed humbucker and – get this – two T-type single-coils, in a genuine departure for the classic design. Great look and price too. The Fret King offers a flamed maple top, a neck humbucker, an acoustic chamber and supreme build quality. It's way more money, but ignore it at your peril...

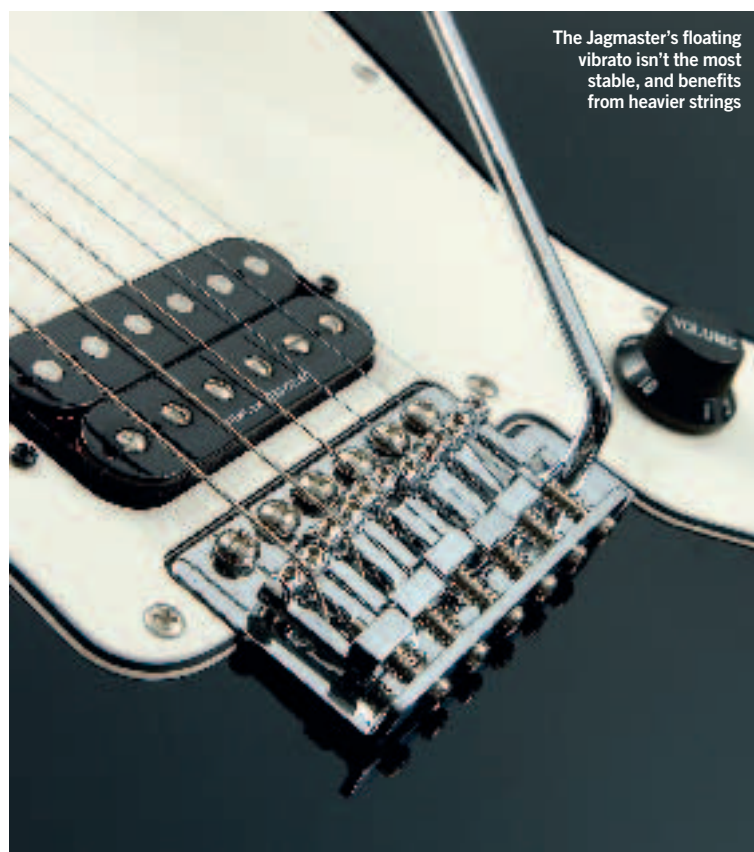
TELE CUSTOM II

Gibson Les Paul Faded DC	£POA
G&L Tribute ASAT Special from	£469
Fender Aerodyne Telecaster	£549

G&L's Tribute ASAT has high-output single-coils and a gorgeous neck – we're constantly struck by the value of these guitars. Gibson's Faded DC bears only a passing resemblance to the Tele Custom II but it has a pair of P-90s and prices are falling quick – we've seen one for under £500! Fender's Aerodyne guitars are strangely attractive, none-more-black items loaded in this case with a P-90 and bridge single-coil. Coupled with the moody livery and you're on to a winner...



Even on a budget there are nice touches, like the original 'Custom' logo



The Jagmaster's floating vibrato isn't the most stable, and benefits from heavier strings

→ feel of the Squier to their own instruments... go figure!

SOUNDS: The expanse of alder body wood and the inherent class of the Duncan Designed humbuckers ensures that the Jagmaster is one loud guitar and, for any rock style, be it riffing, thrashing, soloing or even flailing, you'll both look and sound the part.

We were a little put off by the lack of perfect tuning stability afforded by the light string gauge and floating vibrato, so we'd recommend maybe upping to a set of .010-.046-inch and stretching them well before fitting.

That easily rectified niggle aside, the Jag performs as well as we'd hoped. And as the body shape automatically ensures access to all frets, so all genres

that match a humbucker are well-suited to the Jagmaster.

Verdict

One thing is undeniable: Squier is going to sell container-loads of each of these models. The RRP of each is well below what we'd be prepared to pay and, even though there's a wobbly control here or a splash of sealant there, each is pretty much above criticism.

If we had to choose our favourite it'd probably be the Tele Custom, as the look, tonal performance and sheer vibe is almost irresistible. If more subdued styles are your bag, then the P-90s afforded by the Custom II will answer the prayers of certainly your bank manager, and the neck on our example was just too good to be true.

STANDARD JAGMASTER TEST RESULTS

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


■ **WE LIKED** Massive tone, lovely vintage-style neck and cool shape

■ **WE DISLIKED** Only the slight tuning problems

The expanse of alder body wood and the inherent class of the Duncan Designed humbuckers ensures that the Jagmaster is one loud guitar

The '51 is a step lower down the ladder but is no less laudable for that and, as a genuinely new design, it works very well indeed. As a first time-buyer you'll get a choice of three finishes, a wealth of useable tones and a guitar that your teacher will probably find difficult to put down. We'd probably change the neck pickup for something slightly smoother but, at just shy of \$140, we're not going to complain too loudly.

Even the Jagmaster, the shape of which is without doubt an acquired taste, holds its own very well and, with just a slight change of spec to suit our personal tastes – heavier strings and a better set-up – we'd probably have this one too.

All four demand attention regardless of your stature and the size of your wallet: we really can't put it any more strongly than that. 

Squier '51

Guitarist RATING ★★★★★

Tele Custom

Guitarist RATING ★★★★★

Tele Custom II

Guitarist RATING ★★★★★

Standard Jagmaster

Guitarist RATING ★★★★★

SQUIER STANDARD JAGMASTER

PRICE: £229.99

ORIGIN: China

TYPE: Shape solidbody electric

BODY: Alder

NECK: Maple, bolt-on

SCALE LENGTH:

610mm (24-inch scale)

NUT/WIDTH: White

polycarbonate/42mm

FINGERBOARD:

Rosewood/241mm

radius

FRETS: 22 medium

jumbo

HARDWARE: Vintage

vibrato, Squier standard

machines, all chrome

STRING SPACING,

BRIDGE: 53mm

ELECTRICS: Two

Duncan Designed

humbuckers, master

volume, master tone,

three-way toggle

WEIGHT (kg/lb):

3.25/7.7

OPTIONS: The sunburst

finish option also includes

a tortoiseshell

scratchplate and white

humbuckers

LEFT-HANDERS: No

FINISHES: Black (as

reviewed), three-colour

sunburst

The rivals

STANDARD JAGMASTER

Stagg M350-MRD

from £125

Fender Toronado £679.99

Fret-King Ventura

from £899

Stagg's M350-MRD is equal parts Jag (body), Strat (pickups) and Hofner (headstock). The Toronado is similar to the Jagmaster, though it has a pair of Atomic humbuckers and Gibson-style controls. Meanwhile, the retro Ventura comes with either a pair of 'buckers or P-90s, each bearing Trev Wilkinson's silky touch, and a tone that's never short of oomph!