

FENDER ROAD WORN & SQUIER CLASSIC VIBE TELES £369-£889
ELECTRICS



PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOBY SESSIONS



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Tele State

We look at recreations of four different-style Telecasters. But are they as good as the old ones, and how do Chinese-made Squiers stand up alongside Mexican-made Fenders? Let's find out...

by Dave Durban & Simon Bradley



Fender Road Worn & Squier Classic Vibe Telecasters £369-£889

What we want to know

- 1 More cynical Fender repackaging then?**
You could take that attitude, or you could simply enjoy two of Fender/Squier's best ranges. Both sets offer quality that belies their price tag – stylistically they're not new of course, but just look at them!
- 2 How close are they to the 'real thing'**
Although the vintage market has taken a dive, you're still looking at four figures for a good one. The Road Worns are a big hit in Guitarist towers, while the Classic Vibes are less vintage-specific, but capture that aged feel. Prices are rising, but these are hard to beat.
- 3 Who's gonna play 'em?**
Once the Deluxe was derided as a symbol of Fender's decline. A few decades on it's one of the hippest Teles out there. The Customs have plenty of artist support and the Thinline is a great Tele alternative. So who'll play 'em? Loads of you!

The Fender Telecaster Deluxe and Telecaster Custom have certainly polarised opinion since their introduction almost 40 years ago, but regardless of what the history books say, both have become popular – Keith Richards, Buddy Guy and modern strummers such as Thom Yorke have all embraced either model at various times.

These days, seventies-era Deluxe and Custom models could hardly be any trendier, but procuring an original is far beyond many players' means. Furthermore, the build quality of seventies-made Fenders is notoriously inconsistent. So, for 2010, albeit in limited numbers, Fender has added this pair to its Mexican-made and aged Road Worn series – guitars that boast very convincing aged finishes and hardware along with a few modern tweaks. Way cheaper than a real example or a Custom Shop imitation, Road Worns pack a huge bang for your buck.

We had our first experience with Squier's exciting Classic Vibe series back in issue 308, a range intended to offer guitars that look back to Fender's past but without necessarily being constrained by a vintage-correct specification. In our previous review we checked out a pair of Strats plus the fifties-style Tele; here we get the

chance to evaluate a further duo of now-classic singlecuts, a breathy semi-acoustic Thinline and, arguably, one of the finest Tele designs Fender has ever created, the Custom. Teletastic!

Road Worn '72 Deluxe

On first inspection, any thoughts of corners being cut due to Mexican production are immediately dispelled. We're greeted here with subtle aging, a lightweight alder body that sings acoustically and an instant vintage vibe.

The thin Olympic white finish is gloss-less and almost translucent in places thanks to the lack of a primer basecoat.

There are a handful of random scrapes and dings on the top and bottom edges, as well as convincing forearm wear and finish checking, but it's all historically sympathetic and looks about as cool and knackered as Keef himself.

The vintage feel continues as the neck displays some of the

The rivals

'72 Road Worn Deluxe

Fender's Custom Shop Nocaster Relic (£2,391) is close to the real thing and is a staple of the Time Machine range. The **Classic Series '72 Tele Deluxe** (£686) is the natural rival for this – it's a real indie icon, is cheaper and much more available. The **Classic Player Telecaster** with Black Dove pickups (£749) adds the twist of Black Dove soapbar single-coils for some real top-end sparkle.



The maple fingerboard has been carefully worn to reflect the aged vibe



telltale signs of 30 years' playing. The fretboard's aging will seem a little formulaised for some tastes, though the fret work is impressive, with each mirror-like fret expertly crowned and seated. Unlike many originals that have a thick polyurethane finish, the one-piece 'C'-profile neck here has

The rivals

'72 Road Worn Custom

Fender's Mexican '72 Custom (£807) comes in similar spec but with a choice of rosewood or maple neck. **G&L's ASAT Classic Bluesboy Semi-Hollow** (from £799) features the Custom's humbucker/single-coil configuration. More affordable is **Squier's Tele Custom II** (£286), with dual Duncan Designed P-90s it provides plenty of single-coil spank, all for a modest outlay.

had its gloss urethane finish stripped back to nearly bare maple. It gives us a wonderfully natural, played-in feel that allows your palm complete freedom to roam up and down the neck, lending itself to high octane rhythm playing. Along with its standard 648mm scale we get a flatter 305mm (12-inch) fingerboard radius that creates a slinky, butter-like feel. If only all vintage samples played as well as this!

On both our Deluxe and Custom, the aging on the plastic parts and hardware really adds to the vibe – there's ample 'grime' in the grooves of the skirted amp control knobs and the colouration of each of their three-ply 'guards looks as convincing as the real thing.

As is traditional on the Deluxe, Fender is using its new

variants of the Wide Range humbucker – a well-liked pickup that was often let down in the past by the guitars on which it was used. These ones are fully equipped with tarnished covers and the occasional, well-placed ding.

Road Worn '72 Custom

There are obvious similarities between the finish and wear of our Tele duo that illustrate these guitars are aged to a basic template. Having said that, however, there are a number of notable dissimilarities. The most obvious is the colour – the edgier black finish here lends itself particularly well to the aging process.

Another significant difference lies in the more traditional looking Tele neck

and smaller headstock design. Here we have a dot-inlaid rosewood fretboard (spared the aging process because rosewood fingerboards are traditionally unfinished) married with a vintage Fender radius and smaller fret wire. It gives the Custom a softer feel and, with the more vintage-y spec, it doesn't have quite the slinky modern feel of the Deluxe. That said, traditional Fender fans will feel more than at home with the Custom's light action and that great played-in vibe.

These differences aside, when it comes to choosing between the Deluxe and the Custom, without question the most important factor to be considered are the pickups. Here, the Custom blends single-coil bite at the bridge with the grunt of a humbucker, which really splits opinion – many adore the versatility and others struggle to tame that relatively high-output neck humbucker.

Sounds

The Deluxe has become a staple for a great swathe of alternative styles of music, mainly because it's one of Fender's most muscular sounding Teles to-date. The bridge humbucker possesses a sweet and chewy mid-range married to a sparkly top-end with plenty of zing. There's no soupy low-end like that of a Les Paul, but as a result the Deluxe sings with a modest amount of gain and really cuts through a mix without ever sounding, or feeling, overly glassy. It naturally lends itself towards a myriad rock and blues styles, from the Stones to edgy Biffy Clyro-type rock – it's all there under your fingers. ➤



Anyone currently exhaling loudly at a new rusty guitar? Artificially aged guitars will always be anathema to many



In contrast to the bridge, the neck and middle mixed positions offer a more considered PAF-like neck tone – its added warmth provides ample depth for bigger blues-rock solos while being delicate enough for soft picking accompaniments, as you can hear on this month's CD.

The Custom sounds brasher than the Deluxe, with more twang, and its bridge single-coil reacts superbly with amp grit yet lacks nothing in attack, with a brassy mid-response and snaring highs – The Clash-meets-Tele-toting-Townshend.

The middle mixed position combines the Tele's brassier character with the power and warmth of the humbucker – great for characterful lead chops or articulate Andy Summers-style rhythms. Balancing the two pickups does take time to get used to. We found that dialling down the neck's volume 10 per cent helped keep things on a par, but leaves a little juice in the tank for those fruity bluesy solos.

Squier Classic Vibe Thinline

Based on the first late-sixties style, this Thinline goes for a semi-solid mahogany body (originally ash was offered as well) with its now-famous and much copied, single f-hole. Certainly the semi-solid design creates a lightweight guitar, the lightest on review, and the neck is a player's dream. Constructed from a light yet subtly grained single piece of maple, it has a nicely modern 'C'-style shape that's wide enough to allow for all manner of techniques, yet chunky enough in depth to be welcoming to players of any



The dark stain on the Thinline gives it a real classic appearance

standard. The vintage split-barrel tuners are styled after the Kluson originals and the nut, as on all four of these Teles, is called 'synthetic bone'.

The second 1972 Thinline featured a pair of Wide Range humbuckers but here the pickup configuration remains true to the classic Tele template. Both feature Alnico V magnets and typically comprise an open single-coil in the bridge with a smaller, chrome-covered unit at the neck. The controls are similarly familiar: knurled chrome-knobbed volume and tone controls plus a three-way lever pickup selector.

The chocolatey-dark finish and pale, untinted maple neck certainly give the guitar a classic appearance, and even the more fancy pearloid scratchplate provides just the right amount of, yes, vibe.

Squier Classic Vibe Custom

Based on the first significant change to the original Tele

recipe, straight out of the box this Tele Custom (the original was called the Custom Telecaster, see 'The 'other' Teles') looks the part. The three-colour sunburst has been well-applied and the binding, although bright white, does add the intended touch of class and must have originally been influenced by Gibson's designs.

The neck is spec'd dimensionally the same as the Thinline, but as well as boasting a rosewood 'board, the maple has been given a vintage tint of just the right hue to perfectly complement the gold logo. Actually, the Custom's neck feels more vintage than the modern Thinline neck. It's the same width, but there's more meat at the apex of the 'C'-shape – something that's likely appeal to the more traditional player.

The pickup complement is also shared although the strings here run over three threaded-steel barrels rather than the plain chrome of the

The rivals

Classic Vibe Thinline

Squier's Vintage Modified Tele Thinline (£357) is a cool guitar with Duncan Designed single-coils. **Fender's Classic Series '72 Tele Thinline** (£929) is pricier and has two Wide-Range humbuckers.

Fret-King's 22-fret Country Squire Semitone (£1,699) is one of many 'inspired by' designs based on the Tele. It has a semi-hollow swamp ash body and a humbucker in the neck position.

Thinline's saddles. The electrics are mounted in the classic fashion: on a chromed metal plate that's easier to service and mod than the Thinline's scratchplate-mounted controls.

Sounds

Being partly hollow, the Thinline has a nicely audible acoustic 'brang' to it, and plugging in the bridge pickup offers character aplenty and a warm yet angular and zingy tone. Despite the semi mahogany body, there's no compromise in twang, but the trebly edges are certainly slightly rounded compared to a solid ash-bodied version.

The middle mixed selector position produces suitably mellow tones while the neck pickup is a revelation – almost P-90-like in character, especially if you follow Joe Bonamassa's advice and reduce the guitar's tone by a quarter or so. The guitar is lovely to play, it has a great neck and an



impressive selection of tones – an outstanding and highly affordable Tele.

Compared to the Thinline, the Custom is tonally more familiar. The traditionally appointed alder body gives the guitar a more powerful voice that can be used for all sorts of classic styles. Add a touch of amp gain and the prerequisite open G Keef tuning and it sounds as good as ever, while winding the volume back and slathering on a spring reverb gives just the right clean voice for country doublestops and older bluesy bends.

The guitar's acoustic muscle gives the neck single-coil its customarily toasty selection of tones and we're reminded, as we often are when playing a traditionally appointed Tele, just how versatile this guitar can be.

Verdict

When it comes to the two Road Worn guitars the question isn't 'should I buy one?' but rather,

'which one should I buy?'

Sonically, the guitars are very different but they both have an incredible vintage feel for way under half the price of an original. What's more, the build quality and consistency between the two models is exceptional – any remaining 'made in Mexico' prejudices are misplaced – Fender Japan die-hards take note.

The Deluxe combines the great feel of an old Fender with the playability and tonal prowess of a modern Gibson: it's packed with PAF-like power and an underlying Fender spunk that completes a highly versatile, highly playable package. The Custom, meanwhile, acts and sounds like the Deluxe's punkier brother – biting Tele bridge tones are given a modern edge while the Wide Range neck humbucker can be combined to deliver a broad, Gibson-esque tonal palette. What's not to like? We understand the numbers being made by Fender are

strictly limited, so grab one while you can.

These two Squiers might be half the price of the Road Worns, but they're both exceedingly good Teles and punch above their price even though in recent years these, like many others, have risen quite sharply in terms of cost. Some may feel it's too much to pay for a Chinese-made Squier, but we suggest you plug one in and give it a go before you decide. The Thinline's more open and slightly darker tonality creates a different yet quite classic Tele tone and was our favourite of the Squier duo. But the Custom is no slouch, again recalling a well-loved Tele variant and one that reminds us of the versatility of Leo's original design.

Whatever your budget, and your tonal desire, we can't help thinking that even if you already own a standard Tele, one of these four will appeal. Can you have too many Teles? We think not...

The bottom line

Road Worn '72 Deluxe

We like: Old look, feel and vibe; Gibson-meets-Tele tone; impressive playability

We dislike: Only available in limited numbers and finishes

Guitarist says: Quite simply one of the coolest and most versatile Teles around. Looks and feels ready for the road and takes no tonal prisoners

Road Worn '72 Custom

We like: As the Deluxe; punk and blues tones

We dislike: Ditto the Deluxe; slightly bigger gauge frets would be nice

Guitarist says: A super-versatile Tele capable of capturing old-school trashy punk to soulful blues tones all with an amazing vintage vibe

Classic Vibe Thinline

We like: Lovely neck; cool tones; great look

We dislike: Price may seem on the high side for a Squier...

Guitarist says: A superb version of the classic Thinline that gives a range of tones, full of character

Classic Vibe Custom

We like: Range of classic Tele tones; finish quality; vintage-flavoured neck

We dislike: Ditto the Classic Vibe Thinline

Guitarist says: The Tele Custom has always been a gorgeous guitar – this version is no exception

The rivals

Classic Vibe Custom

Fender's American Vintage '62 Custom Tele (£1,788) is the obvious option for a non-aged version of 'the real thing'. Vintage's AV2S3SB (£399) might not have the bound edge, but adds a central single-coil for a Tele-meets-Strat vibe. The St Blues 61 South (£579) mixes a bound Tele Custom with Thinline construction, a Tele-like bridge single-coil and neck P-90.



The finish quality on the Custom is really top-drawer



**Fender Road Worn
'72 Telecaster
Deluxe**

PRICE: £889.99 (inc gigbag)
ORIGIN: Mexico
TYPE: Single-cutaway solidbody electric
BODY: Alder
NECK: One-piece maple, three-screw bolt-on with Micro-Tilt adjustment and bullet truss rod adjustment
SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5-inches)
NUT/WIDTH: Synthetic bone/42mm
FINGERBOARD: Maple (face of neck), black dot inlays, 305mm (12-inch) radius
FRETS: 21, medium jumbo frets
HARDWARE: Aged chrome vintage-style Strat string-thru hardtail bridge, Fender vintage-style 'F'-logo tuners
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 52.5mm
ELECTRICS: Two Fender Wide Range humbucking pickups (neck/bridge), three-position toggle pickup selector switch, individual pickup volume and tone controls
WEIGHT (kg/lbs): 3.2/7.05
RANGE OPTIONS: The Road Worn series includes a fifties-inspired Strat equipped with a maple neck and single-ply pickguard, a sixties inspired Stratocaster with rosewood fingerboard and aged pickguard, and a fifties Telecaster (all £899)
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISHES: Olympic white (as reviewed) and black (nitro-cellulose body, urethane neck)
Fender GBI
01342 331700
www.fender.co.uk

Test results

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

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★



**Fender Road Worn
'72 Telecaster
Custom**

PRICE: £889.99 (inc gigbag)
ORIGIN: Mexico
TYPE: Single-cutaway solidbody electric
BODY: Alder
NECK: Maple, bolt-on
SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5-inches)
NUT/WIDTH: Synthetic bone/41.2mm
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood, clay dot inlays, 305mm (12-inch) radius
FRETS: 21, medium jumbo frets
HARDWARE: Aged chrome vintage-style Strat string-thru hardtail bridge, Fender vintage-style 'F'-logo tuners
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 52.5mm
ELECTRICS: Fender single-coil (bridge) and Wide Range humbucker (neck), three-position toggle pickup selector switch, individual pickup volume and tone controls
WEIGHT (kg/lbs): 3/6.61
RANGE OPTIONS: See '72 Tele Deluxe
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISHES: Black (as reviewed) and sunburst (nitro-cellulose body, urethane neck)

Test results

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

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★



**Squier Classic Vibe
Telecaster Thinline**

PRICE: £389.99
ORIGIN: China
TYPE: Single-cutaway solidbody electric
BODY: Mahogany
NECK: Maple, bolt-on
SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5-inch)
NUT/WIDTH: Synthetic bone/41.3mm
FINGERBOARD: Maple, black dot inlays, 241mm (9.5-inch) radius
FRETS: 21, medium jumbo
HARDWARE: Vintage-style Telecaster bridge with three chromed barrel saddles, Kluson-style tuners, pearloid scratchplate
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 54.5mm
ELECTRICS: Two Squier Custom Vintage-style Alnico V Telecaster single-coils, three-way lever pickup selector, master volume and tone
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 2.76/6.1
RANGE OPTIONS: Aside from the Custom, the only other Classic Vibe Telecaster is the fifties at £337
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISHES: Natural only (polyester body and neck)
www.squierguitars.com

Test results

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

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★



**Squier Classic Vibe
Telecaster Custom**

PRICE: £369.99
ORIGIN: China
TYPE: Single-cutaway solidbody electric
BODY: Alder
NECK: Maple, bolt-on
SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5-inch)
NUT/WIDTH: Synthetic bone/41.3mm
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood, white pearloid dot inlays, 241mm (9.5-inch) radius
FRETS: 21, medium jumbo
HARDWARE: Vintage-style Tele bridge with three threaded-steel barrel saddles, Kluson-style tuners, three-ply mint green scratchplate
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 55mm
ELECTRICS: Two Squier Custom Vintage-style Alnico V Telecaster single-coils, three-way lever pickup selector, master volume and tone
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.13/6.9
RANGE OPTIONS: See Squier Thinline
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISHES: Three-colour sunburst only (polyester body and neck)

Test results

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

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★



The Tele variants have rarely been successful in their own time

The 'other' Teles...

Fender has tweaked its first electric many times, but they never seem to go down well, at first anyway... **by Paul Day**

The Telecaster has now been around for well over five decades and, although the basic design hasn't changed much, Fender has had a few goes at making it into something different. None of these Teles has enjoyed huge success, but some previously less-popular mutations have become decidedly more desirable in recent years, as our review models indicate.

Fender's first fiddle with its earliest electric came in 1959, when Leo and Co decided to bring some class to the bare bones Tele by adding body edge binding and a sunburst finish. These enhancements warranted the appropriately more upmarket Custom Telecaster model logo. The binding process initially proved tricky to master and Fender enlisted the assistance of acoustic maker Martin. The Custom Telecaster was also among the earliest Fenders to employ a rosewood fingerboard on a maple neck, a combination that soon replaced the all-maple equivalent across the range.

The first significant design departure didn't appear until nine years later, with the launch of the Telecaster Thinline. This boasted an ash or mahogany semi-solid body, while a single f-hole signified a modest amount of internal airspace. Like its Custom cousin, the Thinline initially retained the Tele's traditional two-pickup layout and control complement, but the latter was now incorporated into an extended, much curvier scratchplate.

Humbuckers ruled the roost by the early seventies and Fender felt obliged to introduce its own version. This featured an unusual staggered polepiece layout and was the work of Seth Lover, the brain behind Gibson's original no-noise design. The Thinline was first to receive the new Fender pickup, which formed part of a major makeover. The revised end result included a re-shaped scratchplate bearing a brace of them, while the traditional Tele bridge was replaced by the small sort previously seen on the non-vibrato Stratocaster. As

with other Fenders of the time, the headstock gained a 'bullet' type truss-rod adjuster, while a neck-tilt mechanism was installed at the other end of the neck. The latter was now secured to the body by three screws rather than four, via a suitably re-shaped neckplate. This idea seemed okay on paper, but suffered in practice, mainly due to the subsequent cost-cutting measures Fender made during manufacture.

Next to feature the new humbucker was the Telecaster Custom, introduced in 1972 and effectively replacing the previous bound-bodied Custom Telecaster. The change of name involved a simple word switch, but the two guitars were very different. The new model naturally shared the Thinline's neck construction changes and similarly supplied the fatter sounds that were by then very

much in fashion. Many players found the normal Tele neck pickup too feeble and a common method of injecting more muscle was to replace this small single-coil with a humbucker.

The Telecaster Custom made the modification official and was also the first Fender solid to employ decidedly Gibson-style circuitry, with twin volumes and tones partnering a three-way toggle type selector, all laid-out like a Les Paul on a necessarily more sizeable scratchplate. The blend of two brands didn't win too many friends the first time round, although Rolling Stone Keith Richards thought differently and his high profile handling of this Tele helped convert a few players to the Custom cause.

Undeterred by the Custom's somewhat cool reception, Fender further warmed to the going-Gibson idea the following year by launching the Telecaster Deluxe. This went the whole hog, combining the Custom's Les Paul-like control layout with two humbuckers. The pickup change again entailed using the smaller, standalone bridge from the Strat and this six-string also supplied the Deluxe's neck, while a few examples even came complete with a vibrato unit that was borrowed from the same source.

This somewhat bizarre blend of Fenders fared worse than the Custom and by 1981 all these variations had been abandoned. Although gone and seemingly best forgotten, during the next decade they were brought back into the spotlight by a new generation of younger players, who ignored earlier misgivings and helped elevate them to their now fashionable status. It's therefore hardly surprising that the past few years have seen Fender increasingly re-visiting these previously undesirable designs, cashing in on their belated success by offering everything from accurate repros to modified interpretations more in tune with modern styles. So, what about that Starcaster, then? **■**

It's hardly surprising that the past few years have seen Fender re-visiting these previously undesirable designs