

FENDER CLASSIC PLAYER DELUXE TELECASTERS £609
ELECTRICS



PHOTOGRAPHY BY NEIL GODWIN



Fender Classic Player Deluxe Telecasters £609

Fender revisits the Telecaster Deluxe – an ugly duckling that turned into a rather trendy swan... *by David Durban*

Fender's Telecaster Deluxe has become rather fashionable in recent years, thanks in no small part to the likes of Ryan Adams, Thom Yorke of Radiohead and Blur's Graham Coxon.

A feature of the original Deluxe was its humbucking pickups, a direct response to the Les Paul fever of the late sixties. Initially, in 1971, the Thinline Telecaster was revamped with two Seth Lover-designed humbuckers; the following year the second version of the Telecaster Custom appeared complete with the popular aftermarket mod of a humbucker in the neck position only. Then in 1973 the Deluxe appeared with a pair of humbuckers, a Strat neck and in either vibrato or hardtail versions – for many at the time, the Deluxe was a tweak too far. The vibrato version was discontinued after 1974, the Thinline was dropped in 1979 and the hardtail Custom and Deluxe were axed in early 1981.

So, why has Fender chosen to revisit the Deluxe? “For many years the Stratocaster was hands-down more dominant,” confirms Fender's marketing director Justin Norvell, “but the Tele has been gaining for several years now – all the more reason to expand our selection of Tele guitars!”

Fender already offers three humbucker-equipped Teles, including a Deluxe, within the Classic series but this new trio are part of the Classic Player series. “Classic Players are popular vintage models, but slightly altered or tweaked for improved playability or a different tonality,” says Norvell. But are they simply fashion accessories, or do these designs really offer us something new and credible? Let's find out.

Telecaster Deluxe with Vibrato

This Deluxe is the closest of the three to a true reissue. It certainly is a Strat player's Tele, with its perfectly set-up vintage Strat-style vibrato, a deep contoured belly scoop and a

one-piece maple Strat neck. With a slim 'C'-section it feels much like a late sixties Strat – a modest palmful, topped off with a Gibson-like 12-inch radius that smooths out those big blues bends and suits a modern, hard rock attack. It's secured to the body with a notorious three-bolt fixing – not a bad design per se – along with other seventies essentials such as the micro-tilt neck pitch adjustment and bullet truss rod.

Both the Deluxe and Thinline Deluxe share common electronics, featuring Fender's distinctive looking Wide Range humbuckers (see the Fenderbuckers box) – all three feature LP-alike individual

It's a Strat player's Tele, with its vintage vibrato, a deep contoured belly scoop and a one-piece maple Strat neck



The Strat-style vibrato and humbuckers make for a very different kind of Telecaster



volume and tones for each pickup, plus a three-way pickup selector switch.

Sounds

Setting our Bad Cat Lil' 15 on the clean channel with slight raspy crunch, we hear a brighter sounding Les Paul, with an underlying Fender airiness and twang – Tele lovers will still be more than

comfortable here. Anything from chimey, almost trashy Ryan Adams tone works – right up to alternative rock rhythms.

Loading on the gain gets us into rockier territory; from intricately played power chords and lead, to Billy Talent-style riffing – and although this format may not work for speed demons, all-round rock players will find lots to love here.

The Deluxe with vibrato may not work for speed demons, but all-round rock players will find lots to love here

The middle selection, with the application of some mild gain, offers a more recognisable Fender-style attack, with a snappy top-end which lends itself to rhythm styles, while blending the two volumes produces some subtle Gibson-style mixes.

The neck pickup dials in thick plummy blues or greasy seventies rock. A dose of mild gain gives Page-esque solos a Les Paul vibe, and with a bit of fuzzy gain and tone roll off, Wolfmother lead thrashings work a charm.

Telecaster Deluxe With Black Dove Pickups

The Deluxe Black Dove utilises the same template as our vibrato-equipped model, while the name comes from Fender's DE-9000 P-90-style single-coils. They certainly embody a classic rock vibe and the black pickup covers, especially with the black three-ply scratchplate and crimson red finish, give the guitar a classic SG quality. Indeed, the only other difference is the two differing finish options that are offered, although we would love to see this one in sunburst.

The Rivals

Schecter's PT Fastback (£599) is an affordable T-shape guitar that features Duncan Designed humbuckers and a black block-inlaid maple neck, which gives it a real fresh rock look. Looking in-house, **Fender's Classic Series '72 Telecaster Deluxe** (£686) is still a true indie-rock icon, which features the Seth Lover-designed Wide Range humbuckers and a classic seventies big Stratocaster-style headstock. The well-regarded **G&L ASAT Classic** is available in the Tribute Series (£719) and is another quality T-shaped guitar. Among its features are the USA-made Magnetic Field Design single-coils.

Sounds

With the bridge position selected, the Black Dove offers typical single-coil bite from the top end, however, this is kept in check with a spank-a-plenty blend of brassy lows and sweet mids. It's a great tonal platform for snappy country runs, indie-rock rhythms and heavier rock clean sections.

More vigorous gain opens things up. The sweet and punchy mid-range seems to blend effortlessly with the brittle Fender-y top end, delivering a biting yet moreish rock tone in a similar fashion to a Les Paul Special – it's bouncy, bubbly and cutting. Even down-tuned with heavy overdrive, it keeps full string definition and gives heavier riffing a real edge.

Middle and neck positions aren't quite as hot as the bridge



The solidbodied Deluxes feature the large 1970s-style Strat headstock



selection, but the presence of the larger P-90 coil brings a more Strat-like tone. A smooth, brassy low end reminds us of classic vintage Strat tones, sitting firmly in both vintage and modern camps.

Telecaster Thinline Deluxe

The Thinline Deluxe combines two of the guitar world's most classic designs – the Telecaster and Gibson's ES-335. In the construction stakes Fender has excelled with all these guitars, but the Thinline is even better. The overall fit and finish is genuinely superb, especially considering its price. Moreover, a silky black finish is entirely blemish-free, even around the tricky f-hole.

Just like the original, we have a more traditional slab Tele body – no belly contour this time. However, thanks to its semi-solid design, it's the lightest of our trio (and lighter than many originals we've encountered). Meanwhile, its distinctive and shapely, off-white pickguard gives this Thinline that desirable vintage vibe, enhanced by its correct, early seventies-style Tele neck and headstock. We also get Fender's modern, flatter-than-vintage 9.5-inch radius with bigger frets along with the original-style six saddle bridge.

Sounds

Strummed acoustically, the Thinline is unsurprisingly the loudest of our trio and although its intrinsic character is very similar to the solid, humbucker-equipped Deluxe, because of its semi-hollow construction it's less dense sounding with an airy, swirly tone.

Clean, the bridge pickup's soft low-end and bumped mids help mellow this sprightly guitar. More gain gives individual notes plenty of cut and thrust, while open chords sound lush, thick and resonate in typical semi-hollow fashion. There really are few limits tonally.

Sticking with the overdrive, the middle positions offer sweet and snappy Gibson-type tones, perfect for edgy rhythms – blues players, this is your Fender/Gibson hybrid sound.

The neck offers a creamy mid-range with ES-335-like thickness, which carries a similar single-note, airy resonance. Overall, the Wide Range humbuckers aren't as hot as a modern ES-335 and are brighter and snappier, in true Fender style.

Fenderbuckers - the Wide Range story

"Seth Lover (creator of the original PAF humbucker) designed the Wide Range humbucker for Fender back in the day," explains Fender's Justin Norvell. "A feature of the originals was the use of the 'cunife' (copper/nickel/iron) magnet material, which is no longer available. This material was similar to Alnico, except that it could be moulded and this attribute was used to make polepiece magnets with screw threads so they could be adjusted up or down. It enabled an adjustability in a configuration where the magnet is the pole piece, rather than an adjustable slug

or screw, with a bar magnet underneath the coil – as you see on standard humbuckers or P-90s.

"The original pickups were misunderstood. They were clear sounding humbuckers that had more of a single-coil tone, a lot like the Gretsch Filter'Trons. Everyone expected a humbucker to have high output and that characteristic mid-range bump, especially given the large size of the Wide Range pickups. So, our standard reissue Wide Range 'buckers replicate the look of the original pickup, but actually have more normal humbuckers inside."



The Thinline Deluxe comes with Fender's new design Wide Range humbuckers



Verdict

These guitars all represent astonishingly good value. With a modern perspective, the once clunky Deluxe with vibrato seems a lot more valid, delving into Tele, Strat and Gibson worlds. From blues and pop to classic and heavy rock, it does it all and looks pretty cool doing it. The Black Dove loses the vibrato, but with its excellent P-90-style single-coils, mixes up Fender twang and SG-like tonal bite. Finally, the Thinline Deluxe takes two iconic models and brings a real Fender-y take on the ES-335 format that will surely appeal to both traditional Tele and Gibson semi-hollow lovers.

So are these fashion accessories? Well, yes, but all three are also very, very good electric guitars! 🎸

The Bottom Line

Telecaster Deluxe With Vibrato

We liked: Big frets; comfortable and flatter feeling neck; the overall fit and finish

We dislike: Nothing

Guitarist says: Great blend of the Deluxe, Tele and Strat, plus a vintage vibe. The new Wide Range humbuckers offer a real combination of Fender and Gibson sounds

Telecaster Deluxe With Black Dove Pickups

We liked: Ditto above

We dislike: Nothing

Guitarist says: A real rock 'n' ready Tele with a bit of SG and Strat about it. What's not to like?

Telecaster Thinline Deluxe

We liked: The vintage looks, bigger frets and brilliant semi-hollow fit, finish and tone

We dislike: Nothing

Guitarist says: A very affordable blend of ES-335 tones, but with a snappier Tele edge that really opens this guitar up to a myriad of playing styles



Fender Classic Player Telecaster Deluxe With Vibrato

PRICE: £609
ORIGIN: Mexico
TYPE: Single-cutaway solidbodied electric
BODY: Alder
NECK: One-piece maple, 'C'-shape with gloss urethane finish, three-bolt neck plate with Micro-Tilt and bullet truss rod nut
SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5 inches)
NUT/WIDTH: Synthetic bone/42mm
FINGERBOARD: Maple, black dot inlays, 305 mm (12-inch) radius
FRETS: 21, medium jumbo
HARDWARE: Chrome Fender vintage-style synchronised vibrato, Fender/Schaller 'F'-style tuners
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 52.5mm
ELECTRICS: Two Fender Wide Range humbuckers, two volume and tone controls and a three-way selector
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.7/8.2
RANGE OPTIONS: Another Tele with vibrato is the '60s Custom Telecaster with Bigsby (from £791). For 'buckers but no vibrato, try the Classic Series '72 Tele Deluxe (from £789.99)
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISHES: Three-colour sunburst (as reviewed, no upcharge) and black
Fender GBI
01342 331700
www.fender.com

Test results

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

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★



Fender Classic Player Telecaster Deluxe With Black Dove Pickups

PRICE: £609
ORIGIN: Mexico
TYPE: Single-cutaway solidbodied electric
BODY: Alder
NECK: One-piece maple, 'C'-shape with gloss urethane finish, four-bolt neck plate and bullet truss rod nut
SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5-inches)
NUT/WIDTH: Synthetic bone/42mm
FINGERBOARD: Maple, black dot inlays, 305 mm (12-inch) radius
FRETS: 21, medium jumbo
HARDWARE: Chrome Fender vintage-style hardtail bridge, Fender/Schaller vintage 'F'-style tuners
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 52.5mm
ELECTRICS: Two DE-9000 Black Dove single-coil pickups, two volume and tone controls and a three-way pickup selector switch
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.4/7.5
RANGE OPTIONS: Aside from the three review guitars, the only Tele in the Classic Player series is the Baja Telecaster (£530). The Squier Vintage Modified Tele Custom II (£243) also features P-90-style single-coils
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISHES: Black or crimson red transparent (as reviewed)

Test results

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

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★



Fender Classic Player Telecaster Thinline Deluxe

PRICE: £609
ORIGIN: Mexico
TYPE: Semi-Hollow single-cutaway electric
BODY: Ash
NECK: One-piece maple, 'C'-shape with gloss urethane finish, four-bolt neck plate and bullet truss rod nut
SCALE LENGTH: 648 mm (25.5-inches)
NUT/WIDTH: Synthetic bone/42mm
FINGERBOARD: Maple, black dot inlays, 241 mm (9.5-inch) radius
FRETS: 21, medium jumbo
HARDWARE: Vintage-style Stratocaster string-through-body hardtail bridge with Fender/Schaller vintage 'F'-style tuners
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 52.5mm
ELECTRICS: Two Fender Wide Range humbucking pickups, two volume and tone controls and three-way pickup selector switch
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.26/7.2
RANGE OPTIONS: The Classic Series includes the '69 Telecaster Thinline (from £678) and the '72 Telecaster Thinline (from £791)
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISHES: Three-colour sunburst and black (as reviewed)

Test results

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

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★