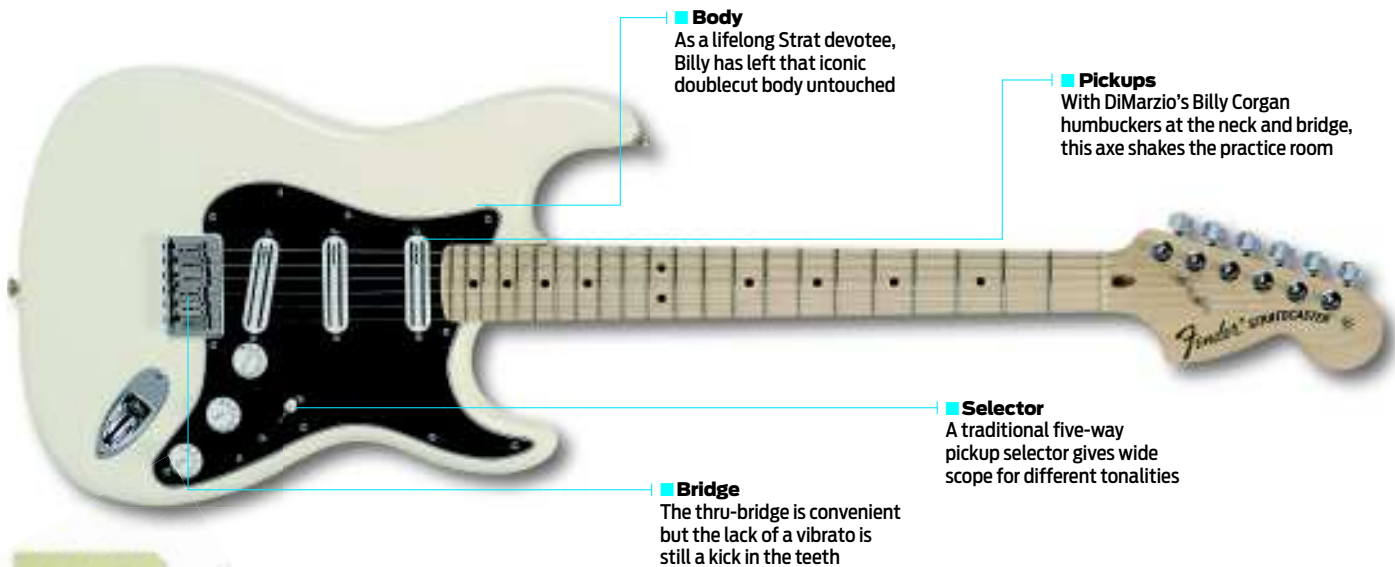


Rocked & Rated





Body

As a lifelong Strat devotee, Billy has left that iconic doublecut body untouched

Pickups

With DiMarzio's Billy Corgan humbuckers at the neck and bridge, this axe shakes the practice room

Selector

A traditional five-way pickup selector gives wide scope for different tonalities

Bridge

The thru-bridge is convenient but the lack of a vibrato is still a kick in the teeth

£919

Fender Billy Corgan Stratocaster

Smashing or pumpkin? Let's hope Corgan's signature axe isn't a Billy-no-mates

He's big. He's bald. He wears a floor-length leather dress and has hands that would beat a mountain gorilla at thumb war. Throw in a pathological hatred for imperfection and dubious 'people skills', and it must have been a tense afternoon in the Fender Custom Shop when Smashing Pumpkins leader Billy Corgan swung by to oversee his signature Strat. God knows how many prototypes later, it's passed the white-glove test of alt rock's hardest taskmaster. It's good enough for him, but is it good enough for us?

The sizzle: Cynics say signatures are all about the fret inlays. Well, screw the cynics; Corgan has got stuck in under the bonnet. "It's not geeked out in a way that only I could be interested in," says Bill of the understated visuals. And faced with the traditional alder body and time-honoured maple bolt-neck, you'd have to nod in agreement. Let's be honest – it's a Stratocaster, really, isn't it?

"It's sort of a standard Fender guitar," he agrees. "I've just hot-rodged up some of the aspects. We have a hard-tail bridge on the back for better sustain, and

a heavier body weight so there's enough low end in the guitar. I've been working with DiMarzio to find a pickup that's got both Strat articulation [and] enough low-end heavy metal to get the Sabbath that I want. A lot of people do endorsements but don't really play the guitars. I'm playing this guitar every night."

We say: Billy Corgan's Strat rocks the house. Sure, the stock body is boring, but the ergonomic contours hammer home the argument that the Strat is still the world's most comfortable design. We've played faster necks, but the modern C-profile on this one is satisfying and chunky, without necessitating goalkeeper hands. One thing we can't excuse is the lack of vibrato, but this guitar is £100 less than a 'normal' US Strat.

And so to those DiMarzios. Corgan's mission to develop a high-gain Strat is admirable, and open-minded guitarists will surely agree he's done it. While there's not a significant boost in sustain to this reviewer's ears, Corgan's bespoke neck and bridge humbuckers (with DiMarzio's Chopper in the middle) bring a depth and snarl that's perfect for

nailing harder Pumpkin moments like *Bullet With Butterfly Wings*, or bolting balls to your own alt-rock classics. As a Strat, it's adaptable too, and what seals the deal is the glassy, classy shimmer when you ditch the gain, combine the neck and middle pickups and break into 1979.

This isn't for Strat purists (it doesn't offer the classic 'Hendrix' singlecoil sound that defines the model), nor is it really for Corgan nuts (you wouldn't know it was his if we hadn't told you). But if you crave a model that tweaks the nose of the Strat format and rocks the roof off in the process, this demands investigation.

Henry Yates

At a glance

Fender Billy Corgan Stratocaster

BODY: Solid alder
NECK: Maple, bolt-on
FINGERBOARD: Maple with dot inlays
SCALE: 25.5"
FRETS: 22
PICKUPS: 2x DiMarzio Billy Corgan humbuckers, DiMarzio Chopper
CONTROLS: Volume, 2x tone, 5-way pickup selector
HARDWARE: Chrome
LEFT HANDED: No
FINISH: Olympic White [pictured], Flat Black
CONTACT: Fender GB 01342 331700
WEB: www.fender.co.uk

SUMMARY

For: Bags of attitude and killer feel
Against: No vibrato or visual whimsy

★★★★☆

TG says... Smashing stuff

"CORGAN'S BESPOKE NECK AND BRIDGE PICKUPS ARE PERFECT FOR PUMPKINS MOMENTS AND YOUR OWN ALT ROCK CLASSICS"



Drop tuning? No problem with this thru-body bridge