



At a glance

Charvel Pro-Mod So-Cal

BODY: Alder
NECK: Maple
FINGERBOARD: Maple
FRETS: 22
SCALE: 25½"
PICKUPS: 1x DiMarzio ToneZone (bridge), 1x DiMarzio Evolution (neck)
CONTROLS: Master volume, 3-way pickup selector
HARDWARE: Black chrome
LEFT-HANDED: No
FINISH: Black, Ferrari Red (pictured), Snow White
CONTACT: Fender GBI 01342 331700
WEB: www.charvel.com

Charvel Pro-Mod So-Cal

£742

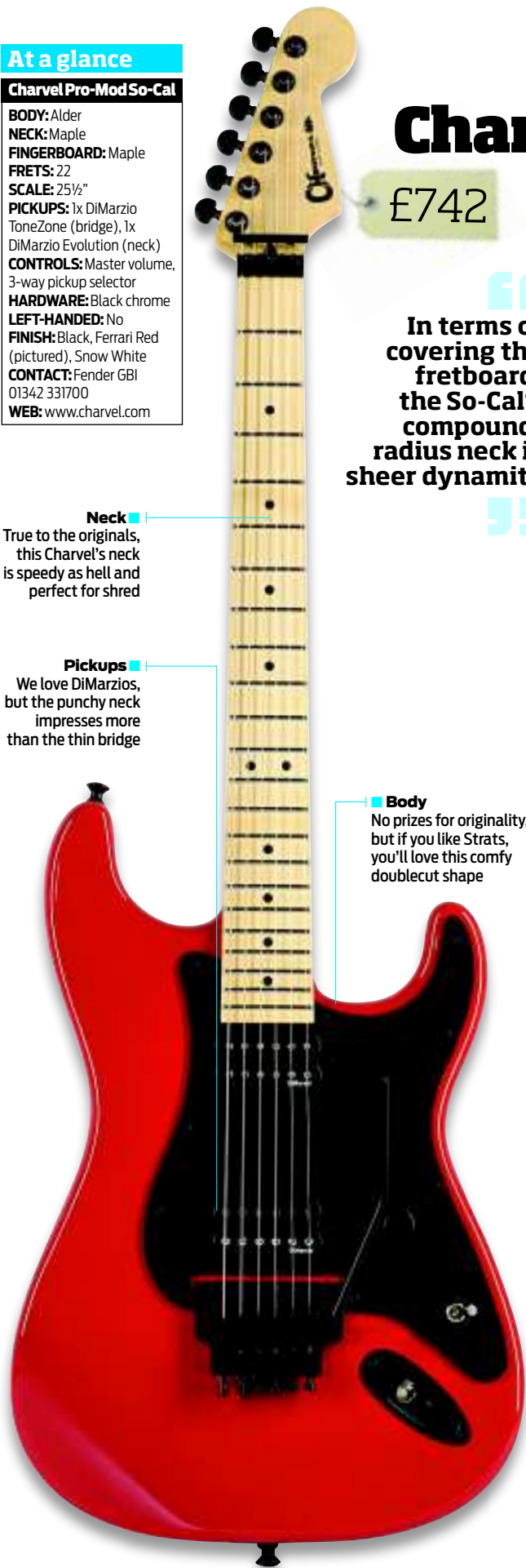
Charvel ruled in 80s California - now it takes on post-millennium Britain

In terms of covering the fretboard, the So-Cal's compound-radius neck is sheer dynamite

Neck
 True to the originals, this Charvel's neck is speedy as hell and perfect for shred

Pickups
 We love DiMarzios, but the punchy neck impresses more than the thin bridge

Body
 No prizes for originality, but if you like Strats, you'll love this comfy doublecut shape



California circa 1980 was not a bad place to be. We're taking the sun, sea and silicone breasts as read here, but don't forget the Superstrats: souped-up shred machines with bespoke parts and pickups. While Eddie Van Halen led the charge of the 'DIY' brigade, Charvel was the golden state's hottest brand, and even if you live in Dorset, you'll be tempted to describe the new Pro-Mod So-Cal as "like, totally rad, dude". Let's skim over the fact it was made in Japan...

Body-wise, Charvels were never particularly imaginative, but they were always dead fast, a tradition continued with the So-Cal's derivative alder shape and compound-radius neck. No, it's not the sort of neck that will have you sitting back, applying subtle vibrato to weeping notes, but in terms of covering the fretboard, it's sheer dynamite, with the jumbo wire ensuring just a brush of the fingertips does the job. The Floyd is official, its smooth response to abuse a big factor in justifying that price tag.

Nostalgia fans will argue that two humbuckers hardly constitutes a Superstrat setup (you can't even split the coils), but they are DiMarzios, so give them a break. Awesome in other axes we've tested, the ToneZone is a little underwhelming here.

Played clean with light-gauge strings, this setting is quite nasal and twang-tastic, making everything sound a bit thin and unintentionally funky. Hit the dirt and it delivers plenty of clarity, but when you stop skimming across the neck and let a note sustain, there's not quite the depth or character you might expect from a guitar of this price. There's no tone knob, either, so you'll want a quality amp EQ to tailor lead breaks.

Fortunately, the Evolution at the neck position saves the day: it's got a little more sonic weight, meaning your shred passages have greater authority behind them. Once TG had wedged the pickup selector, we really started to enjoy ourselves.

Conclusion: It's great to have Charvel back, and even better to see the firm hasn't compromised the ethos of good-time guitars that play like their fretboards have been buttered. If this were purely about handling, we'd be giving out gold stars, but the sonics didn't entirely match, and we're not quite convinced it feels like a £700-odd model. In a market where Ibanez, Jackson et al do the 'cheap shred doublecut' thing so well, it's far from a no-brainer. This is a pretty rad guitar, dude - but not quite bodacious.

Henry Yates

SUMMARY

For: Speedy handling, nice neck tone

Against: Expensive and sounds a little thin



TG says... The So-Cal is So-Cool

This 80s-tastic Charvel is fuelled by DiMarzio pickups. Spandex not included

