

CHARVEL PRO MOD LIMITED WILD CARD AND SO-CAL STYLE 1 £821 & £727  
ELECTRICS



PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOE BRANSTON



# Charvel Pro Mod Limited Wild Card & Pro Mod So-Cal Style 1 £821 & £727

The latest versions of the ultimate hot-rod rock machine, including a new limited edition... *by Simon Bradley*

**W**e fell head over heels in love with the Charvel USA production models released in 2008 and waited with barely hidden excitement for the new batches of custom finishes that were introduced every quarter. As much as we'll always have a soft spot for a flat black San Dimas Style 1, our favourite had to be the Trans Red Ale So-Cal from the seventh batch.

But all good things come to an end... or at least they change direction slightly. Charvel has refined this popular concept; the T-style San Dimas Style 2 has been retired, with the SD and So-Cal Style 1 remaining. These will be generally available in a choice of three standard finishes and specs under the Pro Mod banner. The custom aspect will now be served by a number of Wild Card models that will be released at the start of each quarter and, perhaps of most nominal significance, each of these new models will be built in Japan, not the USA.

## Pro Mod Limited Wild Card

Charvel was right there at the beginning of custom shop guitar order concept, so it

makes sense that this flashy-looking Wild Card instrument displays all the hallmarks of a suitably pimped double-cut. "The ideas basically come from our customers," says Charvel's Mike McGregor. "People feed me ideas all the time, and my team and I simply watch for compelling requests and help them along. A new Wild Card

will be available at the beginning of each quarter and I can tell you that while the next one will not be a huge departure from the current one, subsequent Wild Cards will feature significant differences."

The body is fashioned from a three-piece 'spread' of solid alder and topped with a veneer of quilted maple that's finished

in a cool aquamarine dubbed Dead Calm Aqua; even the logo's hue has been altered to match. Although the Custom Shop produces its fair share of guitars bearing highly figured tops, the instruments bearing graphics hand-painted by the likes of Craig Frasier, Mike Learn or Dan Lawrence are considered 'proper' Charvels. But despite that omission, this model is a true beauty.

As ever, the neck is gorgeous and the edges of the rosewood 'board are 'rolled' between the 22 jumbo frets in a manner akin to James Tyler's guitars. "The slight scalloping is a by-product of the heavy roll I asked for on the necks and is done in sanding," McGregor tells us. "When we started developing the Pro Mod, we brought in the heavy roll as it's been gaining in popularity on Custom Shop orders." The 'played-in' feel that

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The Floyd Rose on the Wild Card model is recessed slightly into the body

## The Rivals

Pro Mod Limited Wild Card

### Jackson's HSS DK2M

**Dinky** (from £619) is available with either a Floyd or hardtail, and the **Dean Vendetta 4F** (£799) includes two USA Dean humbuckers and an original Floyd Rose vibrato. Alternatively, **Fender** manufactures a Standard **Mexican Strat** that's loaded with a Floyd Rose vibrato and an HSS configuration of pickups (£510.86).





## The Rivals

### Pro Mod So-Cal

**Eddie Van Halen's** new **Wolfgang Special** (from £1,021.08) represents a more affordable route to attaining the great man's signature tone, while the **Ibanez RG420EG** (£810.75) mixes a pair of EMG humbuckers with an Edge III vibrato. Top of the heap here remains **Jackson's** truly superb **Adrian Smith San Dimas DK** signature model (£1,799).

this gives the neck is extremely welcoming and adds a level of feel and playability rarely seen at this price point.

A double-locking vibrato is a given with a modern Charvel guitar and here a Floyd Rose FRT-O2000 unit is employed. The bridge is recessed, which isn't an especially common feature, but it does allow for an upward movement of three whole tones on the G string.

There's little doubt that the top-mounted Seymour Duncans loaded here – a JB SH-4 humbucker at the bridge and a pair of Classic Stack Plus STK-S4 single-coils – are likely

to be of greater appeal to customers who don't necessarily place CC DeVille at the top of their own Greatest Players Ever list. Well, there's only one way to find out...

## Sounds

The stacked single-coils provide a nicely silent performance in terms of hum pickup and also give a quite traditional tone – the quality of the clean sounds from positions four (middle and neck) and five (neck) on the selector are well worth mentioning. At the other end of the scale, the JB provides a suitable level of drive: the

guitar sings with a full tone bristling with dynamics and musical harmonics.

The vibrato works well and, as we've said, moves smoothly upwards as well as down and, apart from the full-throated neck humbucker option, the guitar provides an impressive choice of modern and vintage-coloured sounds.

## Pro Mod So-Cal Style 1

Aside from the location of its manufacture, this So-Cal is of exactly the same spec as the USA model we reviewed back in *Guitarist* issue 316. Available in Ferrari red and black, in addition to the snow white version we have on test, this is surely much more of an out-and-out rock machine.

Powered by two DiMarzio humbuckers – a Tone Zone DP-155 in the bridge and a neck-mounted Evolution DP-158 – and regulated by just a single volume control and three-way toggle selector, the So-Cal also features a one-piece maple neck (with rolled edges) taken straight from Charvel's halcyon days. It does feel slightly fatter than that of the Wild Card too.

"There are always variances but they shouldn't be significantly different," McGregor responds. "Additionally, the Wild Card's neck pocket is different due to the fact that the Floyd Rose is recessed. No two necks are identical, though, and we do undertake a lot of hand work."

It's true that the Wild Card's neck pocket is deeper, simply because the Floyd sits within, rather than atop, the body. But with both necks offering a compound radius and almost identical dimensions it's interesting that one still feels thinner than the other. Either way, the So-Cal plays

It's Hollywood Boulevard where the So-Cal is most at home – as playing around with classic US rock songs from the eighties proves



Never tried a guitar with heavily rolled fingerboard edges? Played-in comfort awaits...

wonderfully – by far the most important thing.

Sounds

The So-Cal should satisfy any rock purist as the bridge Tone Zone is high in output, full and cutting. It's possible to ignite some seriously high-octane metal riffs and even dark, Sabbath-style rhythms, but it's Hollywood Boulevard where the So-Cal is most at home – as playing around with classic US rock songs from back in the eighties proves.


Flicking to the neck Evolution provides a smoother yet surprisingly trebly sound and, although we'd prefer it if the toggle switch was slightly closer to the action, there's very little that we can criticise about this guitar.

Verdict

The £999 price of the previous USA production models scored well in our value category, but the reduced price of both of these Japanese guitars is more than welcome. They also include a hefty SKB road case making them, if anything, even better value: at £727 the So-Cal is an absolute steal.

Any rock player will surely find their love for the genre reinvigorated with any and all of the Pro Mod guitars and, if the current Wild Card model doesn't appeal, there's not too

long to wait before another version hits the streets.

Both are well-made, play superbly and offer their own sonic highlights and, whether you prefer the more versatile Wild Card or choose to rock out with the So-Cal, both vociferously recall what first made Charvel great. 

The Bottom Line

Limited Wild Card

**We like:** Lovely neck; authentic custom vibe; versatile performance

**We dislike:** That we have to wait a few months for the next version...

**Guitarist says:** This is certainly something of a departure for Charvel, and is appealing in its own right, but we hope the next will be a graphic-clad eye-popper!

So-Cal Style 1

**We Like:** The unmistakable hot-rod vibe; price; neck

**We dislike:** Nothing

**Guitarist says:** All that separates this from the deleted US models is the price; great rock tone, high spec and the Hollywood vibe remain. At this price, you must seriously consider one



The So-Cal's twin DiMarzio humbuckers are perfect for high-octane rock tone



Charvel Pro Mod Limited Wild Card

**PRICE:** £821.33 (inc SKB hard case)

**ORIGIN:** Japan

**TYPE:** Double-cutaway solidbody electric

**BODY:** Solid alder spread with quilted maple veneer

**NECK:** Quartersawn maple, bolt-on

**SCALE LENGTH:** 648mm (25.5-inch)

**NUT/WIDTH:** Locking/43mm

**FINGERBOARD:** Rosewood, 305-406mm (12-16-inch) conical radius

**FRETS:** 22, jumbo

**HARDWARE:** Floyd Rose FRT-02000 double-locking vibrato, Grover Mini Rotomatic tuners, all black

**STRING SPACING, BRIDGE:** 53mm

**ELECTRICS:** Seymour Duncan JB SH-4 humbucker, two Classic Stack Plus STK-S4 single-coils, five-way lever pickup selector switch, master volume

**WEIGHT (kg/lb):** 3.1/6.83

**RANGE OPTIONS:** The Pro Mod San Dimas Style I HH (£727.33). Several Warren DiMartini Signature models (from £2,799) as well as Custom orders that start at around £2,000

**LEFT-HANDERS:** No

**FINISHES:** Dead Calm Aqua only

Fender GBI

01342 331700

[www.charvel.com](http://www.charvel.com)

Test results

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

**GUITARIST RATING** ★★★★★



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**FRETS:** 22, jumbo

**HARDWARE:** Floyd Rose FRT-02000 double-locking vibrato, Grover Mini Rotomatic tuners, all black

**STRING SPACING, BRIDGE:** 53mm

**ELECTRICS:** DiMarzio Tone Zone DP-155 (bridge) and Evolution DP-158 (neck) with three-way toggle pickup selector switch and master volume

**WEIGHT (kg/lb):** 3.22/7.1

**RANGE OPTIONS:** See Pro Mod Limited Wild Card

**LEFT-HANDERS:** No

**FINISHES:** Snow white (as reviewed), Ferrari red, black

Test results

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

**GUITARIST RATING** ★★★★★