

## FIRST PLAY



### FENDER DELUXE SERIES ROADHOUSE STRATOCASTER

£679

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**WHAT IS IT?** An affordable  
Strat with features even Eric  
Johnson would love...



### FENDER DELUXE SERIES NASHVILLE TELECASTER

£679

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**WHAT IS IT?** A reboot of  
Fender's cult Tele/Strat hybrid

# Brothers In Arms

The Mexican-made Deluxe editions of Fender's finest receive a smart makeover that includes new pickups, and a neck with a secret that just might shock the purists...

**Words** Ed Mitchell **Photography** Olly Curtis & Joby Sessions

**N**ew for 2016, Fender has shown the spec sheets of its popular Mexican-built Deluxe Series Roadhouse Stratocaster and Nashville Telecaster models some love to create a pair of reboots that come seriously well appointed. Getting straight down to business – aside from obvious differences such as the Roadhouse's two-point vibrato unit and the Nashville's six-saddle hardtail bridge – the upgraded models both feature alder bodies, sprayed in flawless gloss polyester, and bolt-on maple necks, with the option of maple and rosewood fingerboards, finished with a satin polyurethane. Keep sniffing around and you'll find other shared features like the 'Modern C' neck profile, 22 narrow/tall frets, a contoured neck heel, synthetic bone top nut and a set of locking









tuners with vintage-look buttons. The latter feature may strike you as a bit belt and braces for a Telecaster, but as the tuning never faltered once during our review, happy days.

One of the most crucial upgrades, however, is something you can't see with the naked eye. While the previous editions of the Roadhouse and Nashville came with a 241mm (9.5-inch) fingerboard radius, the new models pack a flatter 305mm (12-inch) camber. Yes, the same radius as a Gibson Les Paul. Look, Leo Fender and his boys in Fullerton, California, pretty much got everything right when they put together their first guitars in the 50s. That said, there were some niggles: the Tele's tough-to-intonate three-saddle bridge, and the Strat's original three-way pickup selector switch.

Above all, it's the vintage 184mm (7.25-inch) 'board radius that alienates some players. That old-school radius works just fine when you're thumping out chords, but it can cause the strings to choke out when you bend above the 12th fret, unless you hike the action to compensate. Fender's solution was to introduce the modern, flatter 241mm radius you'll find on the majority of its guitars these days, including the Custom Shop Time Machines and Artist models. The result is easier string bending, plus a lower action. The 305mm 'board radius on these new Deluxe models is flatter still.

The previous Deluxe models came with Fender Tex-Mex (Nashville) and Texas Special (Roadhouse) pickups. Note the use of past tense here. The new Roadhouse features three Vintage Noiseless (1st generation) single coil-sized humbuckers wired to a five-way pickup selector blade switch, and master volume and tone controls. Lurking between the volume and tone knobs is the V6 preamp control, a six-position rotary switch that gives you access to a series of tweaked single-coil tones. The preamp is activated by the S-1 switch located on the volume knob, and fuelled by a nine-volt battery accessed via a spring-loaded flap on the back of the guitar.

The Nashville also comes with a trio of Vintage Noiseless pickups: Telecaster-style bridge and neck, plus a Stratocaster model in the middle position. Wiring is your classic Tele – with a twist. Yes, you get a master volume and master tone, topped with knurled flat-top knobs, but you'll also encounter the Strat-o-Tone switch, the marketing department's way of revealing that this guitar has a five-way pickup selector.

### Feel & Sounds

The playability of these guitars is outstanding. Fender could have easily whacked a set of fat frets on the Roadhouse and Nashville, but we like the vintage vibe of these 'narrow-but-tall'

**1.** The previous Roadhouse model was fitted with an old-school Fender Synchronized vibrato, held in place with six screws. The new Roadhouse has a modern style two-point vibrato with vintage pressed steel saddles

**2.** The Roadhouse comes equipped with the V6 preamp with a six-notch preset tone that offers sounds from thin and weedy to a fatter P-90 style voice. The preamp is engaged with the S-1 switch hidden in the guitar's volume control

**3.** Both upgraded models feature bolt-on maple necks, with 'Modern C' profiles for a slim and fast feel in the palm



jobs. We can't imagine anyone taking issue with that shared Modern C neck profile, either. It's slim and fast, especially with that drag-reducing satin polyurethane finish, yet there's still enough palm-filling wood to remind you that you're not dealing with some skin and bones shred machine.

The 305mm fingerboard radius is a revelation. The action in both guitars is set low, but there's no choking or buzzing to get your blood up, if you have a light touch. Those of you

who are a bit more heavy-handed may want to raise the strings a tad, but you'll still enjoy stress-free bending. If you're still struggling with the concept of a Fender guitar with a Gibson-like radius, it's worth noting that iconic Strat-o-phile and fusion genius Eric Johnson spec'd a 305mm radius on his signature Stratocaster. Yeah, now you feel better...

Some forum jockeys have dismissed Noiseless pickups as underpowered and uninspiring. We beg to differ. Plugging in the Roadhouse reveals a slew of classic Strat tones. Okay, this isn't some roaring rock beast, but remember, some of Jimi Hendrix's most cherished tones were created on Strats with the lowest output single coils. Those pickups exploited the natural tone and woodiness of the guitar, and that's what's going on with the Roadhouse. The Noiseless pickups live up to their vow of silence, making them indispensable in a recording situation, but that ability to thwart the pesky 60 cycle hum doesn't come at the expense of tone. In fact, the regular pickups are so addictive that we almost forgot this thing has a built-in active preamp.

The V6 offers a range of sounds from thin and weedy to a much more usable fatter voice, the latter not a millions miles shy of a P-90. The remaining four increments are subtle to say the least and – with respect to the lad or lass with the soldering iron and a dream who designed





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the thing – we have to say the V6 is not this guitar's major selling point. It's fun to fiddle around with, but the truth is we prefer the perennially classic non-preamp tones.

The Nashville's remit is to accommodate a mix of Telecaster and Stratocaster tones. Like the Roadhouse, the pickup sequence is bridge solo, bridge and middle, middle solo, neck and middle and, finally, the neck single coil solo. So, you can select two classic Tele sounds (bridge and neck pickups on their own) and three Strat options: the middle single coil and the two in-between tones.

Tele addicts should have noticed that a much-loved tone has been lost in the reshuffle. The combination of a Tele's bridge and neck pickups is hugely popular with blues, rockabilly and, ironically, country players. The loss of that punchy sound might be a compromise too far for some of you. For everyone else, the Nashville is a Telecaster at its most versatile. The bridge pup has much of the righteous twang that turned the heads of country masters such as Jimmy Bryant, Don Rich and Danny Gatton, but combine it with the middle pickup – or engage the neck and

4. The Roadhouse and Nashville feature locking tuners. That might seem a bit 'belt and braces' for the hardtail Telecaster, but the fact the guitar's tuning is unshakable makes it a good decision in our book

5. The new models are made ultra-playable with the introduction of a 305mm (12-inch) fingerboard radius. This upgrade from the previous models' 241mm (9.5 inches) allows these guitars a buzz- and choke-free performance with a low action

6. The Nashville's trio of Noiseless pickups replaces the Tex-Mex items on the previous model. The new single coils are wired to a five-way 'Strat-o-Tone' pickup selector switch, giving this guitar a more versatile tonal range than a regular Tele





6

middle units – and suddenly you're in Jimi and Stevie Ray territory, especially with a bit of transparent overdrive.

While the Nashville and Roadhouse have similar layouts, in classic style the Tele has a little more girth in its tones than the glassier-sounding Strat. That's hardly more apparent than in the Nashville's neck pickup, which has a warmth and depth that works great for jazz chords.

### Verdict

The previous Deluxe Roadhouse and Nashville guitars were bloody good, and you'll likely find shops flogging them off at clearance prices to make space for the new versions. Don't pull that trigger just yet. This year's models up the ante with greater playability and pickups with the ability to cut it in the studio without driving the engineer up the wall. Aside from the flimsy gigbag included with these guitars, we can't fault them on performance or price. Oh, and while Roadhouse and Nashville might suggest, respectively, an affinity with blues and country, don't be fooled. These truly are guitars for everyone. **G**



### FENDER DELUXE SERIES ROADHOUSE STRATOCASTER

**PRICE:** £679 (inc gigbag)  
**ORIGIN:** Mexico  
**TYPE:** Double-cutaway electric with active preamp  
**BODY:** Alder  
**NECK:** Maple, bolt-on, Modern C  
**SCALE LENGTH:** 648mm (25.5")  
**NUT/WIDTH:** Synthetic bone/43mm  
**FINGERBOARD:** Maple, 305mm (12") radius  
**FRETS:** 22, narrow/tall  
**HARDWARE:** Chrome 2-point Synchronized vibrato with bent steel saddles, low post locking tuners with vintage buttons  
**STRING SPACING, BRIDGE:** 53mm  
**ELECTRICS:** 3x Vintage Noiseless (1st generation) single-coil-sized pickups, master volume with S-1 switch, rotary V6 preamp control, master tone, and 5-way pickup selector lever switch  
**WEIGHT (kg/lb):** 3.7/8.3  
**RANGE OPTIONS:** New in this series are the Deluxe Strat (£759) and Deluxe Strat HSS (£679)  
**LEFT-HANDERS:** No  
**FINISHES:** Olympic White (as reviewed), Classic Copper (with maple fingerboard); 3-Tone Sunburst and Mystic Ice Blue (both rosewood fingerboards)

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 01342 331700  
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9/10

**PROS** The Noiseless pickups and 305mm fingerboard radius conspire to make this the best-sounding and most playable Strat under a grand

**CONS** A guitar this good deserves a better quality gigbag



### FENDER DELUXE SERIES NASHVILLE TELECASTER

**PRICE:** £679 (inc gigbag)  
**ORIGIN:** Mexico  
**TYPE:** Single-cut solidbody electric  
**BODY:** Alder  
**NECK:** Maple, bolt-on, Modern C  
**SCALE LENGTH:** 648mm (25.5")  
**NUT/WIDTH:** Synthetic bone/43mm  
**FINGERBOARD:** Rosewood, 305mm (12") radius  
**FRETS:** 22, narrow/tall  
**HARDWARE:** Chrome 6-saddle hardtail bridge, low post locking tuners with vintage buttons  
**STRING SPACING, BRIDGE:** 53mm  
**ELECTRICS:** 2x Vintage Noiseless (1st generation) single coil Telecaster pickups (bridge and neck), 1x Vintage Noiseless (1st generation) single-coil-sized Stratocaster pickup (middle), master volume, master tone and five-way Strat-o-Tone pickup selector lever switch  
**WEIGHT (kg/lb):** 3.9/8.3  
**RANGE OPTIONS:** The other new Tele in this series is the Deluxe Thinline Telecaster (£759)  
**LEFT-HANDERS:** No  
**FINISHES:** Fiesta Red (as reviewed), Daphne Blue (rosewood fingerboard w/ 3-ply Mint Green scratchplate); White Blonde (maple fingerboard w/ 3-ply Mint Green scratchplate) and 2-Colour Sunburst (maple fingerboard w/ black/white/black scratchplate)

8/10

**PROS** The Tele/Strat hybrid thing makes this a perfect tool for session aces and club band players alike

**CONS** We miss the classic Tele bridge/neck pickup combo; again, the gigbag could use an upgrade