

## FIRST PLAY



**FENDER THE EDGE  
STRATOCASTER**  
£1,359

**WHAT IS IT?** Modern updated version of The Edge's famous 70s black Stratocaster



**FENDER JOHNNY  
MARR JAGUAR**  
£1,709

**WHAT IS IT?** Reworked and improved Jaguar from Johnny Marr, with a little help from his friends

# Back In Black

Two Brits that weren't part of the 60s blues boom make a rare pair in Fender's Artist line-up. Fly the flag or avoid?

**Words** Dave Burrluck **Photography** Olly Curtis

**T**he Edge uses a wide arsenal of guitars, but one of his all-time key guitars is his 1973 black Strat (he was also elected to Fender's board of directors in 2014). If its large headstock hints at that original guitar, it's updated here in numerous ways and, like the Johnny Marr Jaguar, it's been tweaked for pro use, pure and simple. That said, it's loaded with pretty run-of-the-mill updates that you'll find on plenty of contemporary Strats, including: the 241mm (9.5-inch) flatter radius fingerboard, a contoured heel, the modern two-post vibrato with its pop-in arm, rear-wheel locking tuners and Schaller strap locks, a mint-green scratchplate that gives a subtly vintage vibe, aged white knobs and light toning to the maple neck and fingerboard. Incidentally, the neck is spec'd as quartersawn (as opposed to slabsawn) maple: "The strong and stable upgraded quartersawn maple generates a slightly brighter tone," says Fender.









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It's a pretty straightforward drive, too, with a pair of Fender Custom Stagger (flat-pole) Fat '50s in middle and neck positions and a high-output DiMarzio FS-1 to replicate the pickup on The Edge's '73, which he'd retrofitted back in the day. Bearing in mind the FS-1 pickup was launched back in 1974, it may like seem an odd choice with today's range of options, but if it ain't broke... There are no wiring tricks, just the modern spec tone 1 for the neck pickup, and tone 2 for the middle and bridge, the latter being a No-Load control for maximum treble response.

Marr's Jaguar doesn't replicate a specific model, but it does incorporate all of his suggested tweaks and is exactly the guitar he plays himself (although he does remove his signature on the headstock and have the metal parts aged). Fender had made him one in this black finish – a classic 'rockers' vibe – and thought it was a perfect addition to the other colours on offer. It's also the best-selling Jaguar in the line, Fender tell us.

As we reported on its launch back in 2012 (in issue 355), the numerous tweaks were executed by a small team in the UK: Brit repair guru Bill Puppelt, engineering whizz John Moore, and Tim Mills at Bare Knuckle, who set about 'unravelling' the Jag's idiosyncrasies to improve the 'ugly ducking', but still keep the vibe of Fender's most leftfield solidbody. So, while the scale and fingerboard radius remain old-school, and the neck profile is modelled on one of Marr's own Jags from 1965, the bridge saddles are swapped to solid non-height adjustable Mustang saddles that sit flush on the bridge tray and create a wider string spacing – which does mean that the outer

1. The modern Fender two-post vibrato creates a very in-tune and stable vibrato system, along with those tuners
2. The big 70s-style head hints at the inspiration, but this isn't a replica, hence the locking tuners – one of many upgrades
3. The DiMarzio FS-1 first appeared in 1974. "We didn't design it with a vintage sound in mind, but if you're trying to get a blues sound from the bridge position of a maple-neck Strat, you'll be very happy with the extra mids and bass, and the sound still cleans up when the volume is rolled down," says DiMarzio



strings get closer to the fingerboard edge the further up the 'board you go. The bridge pivots in the same fashion, but nylon 'locks' prevent the needle-point pivot screws from moving under tension, plus there's a nylon insert to the vibrato arm collar; it still push-fits, but it feels smoother and less 'floppy' in use.

Another big change is swapping from the Jaguar's dual rhythm/lead concept. Here, we have just a single circuit with a four-way Tele-style switch that offers bridge, bridge and neck (in parallel), neck, and in position four, neck and bridge in series. Additionally, there are two low-profile slider switches for high-pass filters. The top switch is the master filter, while the lower switch is mounted at a right angle and only works on the series linkage, position 4 on the pickup selector.

### Feel & Sounds

These may be two signature guitars from Brit 'guitar anti-heroes', but they really couldn't be more different – and that's just the necks! The Edge's feels very familiar, very mainstream compared with the more potentially Marmite





That indie edge seems built in, adding attitude in spades... making the Marr Jag a great choice for the leftfield

feel of the Marr, which is deeper front to back with a more rounded, more D-like steeper shoulder feel. This is enhanced by the smaller radius wire (2.1mm wide by 0.9mm high) compared with The Edge's bigger gauge (2.6mm wide by 1.1mm high). The Edge's has a glossed face while Marr's is dark, almost black (and presumably stained) bare rosewood.

Supplied setup is noticeably different, too – although that, of course, is easily changed. The Edge goes for 0.009 to 0.042 gauges; Marr has 0.010 to 0.046 (it also comes with an 0.011 to 0.050 flatwound set in the case, for the brave

among us). You'd think that the shorter scale of Marr's model would balance out the feel, but the action feels higher here (it's virtually identical in reality) and there's a subtly shorter, plinkier response. This is probably created by the long 'unused' string length from the bridge to the vibrato, which creates the perception of a stiffer feel.

Most players will find The Edge a more direct, familiar drive that centres on a bright, chiming voice on its neck and middle pickups, with a stronger, more focused but not hugely unbalanced bridge. Played with a little compression, modulation and, of course, delay, it's effortless to produce those sounds of the man himself. But there's plenty more here, and the combination of the balanced neck and middle with that more gain-friendly bridge pickup makes for a hugely versatile vehicle. Indeed, Fender tells us the hardly-Edge-like Noel Gallagher has taken delivery of a couple of these scratchplates and loves them.

The Marr couldn't be more different. Yes, of course, it centres on classic Fender single coil, so it's not the first choice for jazz (not that this

4. Thoroughly tweaked, the Jag's bridge uses Mustang saddles and nylon inserts to prevent it from dropping in height. The arm's collar is also nylon for a firmer feel. A Jaguar vibrato that works!

5. While Marr's vision is for a simpler single-circuit Jaguar, these two high-pass filters remove a little bass and midrange for a more biting voice

6. Sorted by Bare Knuckle in the UK, the Johnny Marr Jaguar is one of the few Fenders with non-Fender-made pickups. Mind you, the replica of Kurt Cobain's Jaguar employs two DiMarzio humbuckers (PAF 36th Anniversary at neck and Super Distortion at bridge). Is there a theme here?



stopped a certain Joe Pass), but whether it's the less sustaining voice or, indeed, the whole package, it sounds older and less modern on the one hand, though not in a gurning blues fashion. It's edgier, not least with those high-pass filters – a very 'rhythm guitar' that Marr proves can serve almost as a blank canvas for quite effected tones. Even so, that indie edge seems built in, adding attitude in spades. If that's not your bag, you might be better off with The Edge's more mainstream squeeze, but the Marr Jag is a great choice for the leftfield.

### Verdict

The success of a signature model – aside from the fans of said artist – is a broad appeal. Marr's Jaguar is exactly that: a niche guitar expanded without losing its DNA. The Edge's Strat (along with his signature amp) was tested and tweaked on the last U2 tour and, while it's a more mainstream piece, it has working pro written all over it. Both guitars have lots to offer, even if you're not a fan of either man. If that's the case, you can always do what Mr Marr does and remove his signature from the headstock! **G**



### FENDER THE EDGE STRATOCASTER

**PRICE:** £1,359 (inc case)  
**ORIGIN:** USA  
**TYPE:** Offset double-cutaway solidbody electric  
**BODY:** Alder  
**NECK:** Quartersawn maple, Modern 'C' profile, large '70s style headstock, bolt-on  
**SCALE LENGTH:** 648mm (25.5")  
**NUT/WIDTH:** Synthetic bone/42.92mm  
**FINGERBOARD:** Maple, black dot markers, 241mm (9.5") radius  
**FRETS:** 21, medium jumbo  
**HARDWARE:** Chrome-plated 2-Point Deluxe vibrato with pop-in arm, 'short post' cast/sealed locking tuners  
**STRING SPACING, BRIDGE:** 52.5mm  
**ELECTRICS:** DiMarzio FS-1 (bridge), Fender Custom Stagger Fat '50s (middle & neck), 5-position lever pickup selector switch, master volume, tone 1 (neck), No-load tone 2 (middle & bridge)  
**WEIGHT (kg/lb):** 3.57/7.85  
**OPTIONS:** No  
**LEFT-HANDERS:** No  
**FINISHES:** Black (as reviewed) – gloss polyurethane body and fingerboard face; satin to neck back

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9/10

**PROS** Sensible upgrades make this a stage-ready, brightly voiced Strat with a kick in the bridge position

**CONS** Very little, but the choice of modern Strats can be overwhelming



### FENDER JOHNNY MARR JAGUAR

**PRICE:** £1,709 (inc case)  
**ORIGIN:** USA  
**TYPE:** Offset double-cutaway solidbody electric  
**BODY:** Alder  
**NECK:** Maple, custom shape (based on JM's '65 Jaguar), bolt-on  
**SCALE LENGTH:** 610mm (24")  
**NUT/WIDTH:** Synthetic bone/42.5mm  
**FINGERBOARD:** Rosewood, 'clay' dot inlays, 184mm (7.25") radius  
**FRETS:** 22, vintage style  
**HARDWARE:** Fender Jaguar bridge with Mustang saddles and vintage style 'floating' vibrato, split-post tuners – all chrome plated  
**STRING SPACING, BRIDGE:** 56.5mm  
**ELECTRICS:** Two custom-wound Bare Knuckle Johnny Marr single-coil pickups, 4-position lever pickup selector switch, master volume and tone; two high-pass slide-switches  
**WEIGHT (kg/lb):** 3.86/8.5  
**OPTIONS:** None  
**LEFT-HANDERS:** No  
**FINISHES:** Black (as reviewed), Olympic White, Metallic KO, Sherwood Green Metallic – nitrocellulose neck and body



9/10

**PROS** Superb re-working of the Jaguar; instant 'indie' sounds with all the niggles of the Jag sorted

**CONS** Even with the tweaks, it's still a 'Marmite' guitar!