



At a glance

Fender Tim Armstrong Hellcat

BODY: Solid mahogany top, laminate back and sides

NECK: Maple

FINGERBOARD: Rosewood

SCALE: 25 1/8"

ELECTRONICS: Fender FTE-3 TN preamp

HARDWARE: Chrome with vintage buttons

LEFT-HANDED: Yes

CONTACT: Fender GBI 01342 331700

WEB: www.fender.co.uk

£329

The Hellcat's acoustic qualities make it very playable, but it scores highest when you plug it in

Body
The Hellcat's solid mahogany top is a nice alternative to spruce

Inlay
The Hellcat Records logo is inlaid along the fingerboard

Preamp
Fender's FTE-3 TN gives a good tonal range when plugged in

Fender Tim Armstrong Hellcat

This acoustic signature is the second most anticipated Rancid release of 2009

Signature guitars are the calling card of any bona fide guitar wielder these days, but it's not a privilege reserved exclusively for million-note-a-minute shredders. Punk anthems need to begin somewhere too, and when the Rancid frontman feels like penning yet another chant-along chorus, he reaches for his battered Fender acoustic.

The Hellcat (named after Tim Armstrong's record label) is based on this guitar. It's an electro-acoustic at a wallet-friendly price with a solid mahogany top, Hellcat inlays and Fender's FTE-3 TN preamp.

After admiring the included signature pick and 'Let's Go!' commemorative strap, you can get down to business. As with many of Fender's acoustics, the 25 1/8-inch neck scale isn't far off that of a Strat, so electric players should be able to switch relatively seamlessly. Strumming some chords gives you a tone that's sonically straight down the middle. The mahogany has a darker tone than spruce with a controlled bass end, and means that the Hellcat doesn't resonate with as much volume or sparkly high frequencies as you get from spruce, so it should appeal if you prefer a mellower sound.

The neck holds its integrity as you move further up towards the dusty end, and the action

remains comfortably low without restricting the string movement when you're playing harder. However, the lack of a cutaway could be the deal breaker if you plan on venturing to the top frets.

Try it plugged in, though, and these points start to make sense. The lack of bottom end energy (which could cause a larger-bodied guitar to rumble its way towards feedback) ensures that the Hellcat stays calm. Adjust the EQ system and this guitar provides both smooth strumming fluidity and just-sharp-enough-to-cut lead sounds. The onboard tuner is a handy feature too.

Conclusion: We were surprised (but not disappointed) when we found out that the usually Gretsch-toting Armstrong was releasing a signature electro-acoustic. Fender's website shows other pros are using this guitar too, among them Alkaline Trio's Matt Skiba and Angels & Airwaves guitarist Matt Wachter.

The acoustic qualities of the Hellcat make it a very playable instrument, but it scores highest when you plug it in. Sure, there are some competitive options to be had out there, but not with this much attitude. If you're a gigging electric/sometimes acoustic player who wants an affordable additional guitar then the Hellcat is for you.

Stuart Williams

SUMMARY

For: Great sound, ballsy appearance

Against: No cutaway, too mellow for some

★★★★☆

TG says... The Hellcat is the (Time) bomb!



Armstrong fans will reckon these inlays are the cat's pyjamas