

GEAR

REVIEW

FENDER JIMI HENDRIX STRAT



FENDER JIMI HENDRIX STRATOCASTER £689

A new way to Experience a timeless classic

SOUTH paw Jimi Hendrix created a legend when he flipped over a right-handed Fender Stratocaster, switched the strings round and then went about the business of becoming the greatest guitarist of all time. It was the late 60s, and he was only reacting to a dearth of decent left-handed guitars, but Jimi's iconic compromise subtly altered the feel and sound of his Strats. The tension in his low E, A and D strings increased, making it easier to tune down to Jimi's favoured E₁, while the high E and B became easier to bend. The angle of his bridge pickup was reversed, too, influencing the guitar's tone. It's these details that Fender has replicated with its new Mexican-built Jimi Hendrix Stratocaster.

Slipping the guitar from its padded gigbag, you'll spy a classic

jumbo frets. And then there's the way it looks...

Some of us shudder at reverse headstocks and the memories of bad hair metal, all-satin spandex and conspicuously placed root vegetables associated with them. Joking aside, flipping the head makes it tougher to reach the tuners, especially the low E. 'Ergonomics', they call that. Annoying is another good word for it. The sacrifice better be worth it...

Fortunately, this guitar is a dream to play. The action is set low – with a set of 0.010 to 0.046 strings – yet there's no danger of any buzzing or choking for those with a light touch. That said, the heavy-handed might want to crank the string height up a notch. The increased tension in the bottom strings, most noticeably the low E, gives this guitar way more spank than a regular Strat, and that tonal

Bottom-string riffs have a huge amount of presence

alder body wrapped in a gloss polyester Olympic White finish. Black is your other finish option. In a twist of irony, there's no left-handed version of this guitar. You could always buy a right-handed Strat and flip it over – let's face it, it's been done before...

Moving on, the non-reversed chrome 'Synchronized' vibrato unit stands guard over a trio of American Vintage '65 single-coil pickups, with the bridge unit reverse-angled like Jimi's. The gloss polyester-coated C-profile maple neck is bolt-on, of course, and features a maple 'board, rear skunk stripe and chrome vintage-style tuners. That's where the old-school stuff ends. This neck has a definite modern set-up thanks to its 9.5-inch radius and 21 medium

punch intensifies thanks to the angled bridge pickup. The single coil's bass-side polepieces sit closer to bridge saddles than on a standard right-handed Strat, which adds some serious twang to the lower strings clean. Dropping in some overdrive gives bottom-string riffs a huge amount of presence, and a staggering level of sustain. Conversely, the treble side of the pickup is further away from the saddles than it should be, which adds a little sweetness to the thinner strings.

The Fender single coil has popped up Forrest Gump-style throughout the past 60 years of music history, and these American Vintage '65 pickups are some of the best examples we've had the pleasure to amplify. Our >>>

AT A GLANCE

BODY: Alder
NECK: Maple, bolt-on
SCALE: 648mm (25.5")
FINGERBOARD: Maple w/ 241mm (9.5") radius
FRETS: 21, medium jumbo
PICKUPS: 3x Fender American Vintage '65 Gray-Bottom single coils
CONTROLS: 1x volume, 2x tone, 5-way blade pickup selector
HARDWARE: Classic Synchronized vibrato, vintage-style tuners – chrome
LEFT-HANDED: No
FINISH: Olympic White (shown), Black
CONTACT: Fender GB 01342 331700
www.fender.com

HEADSTOCK

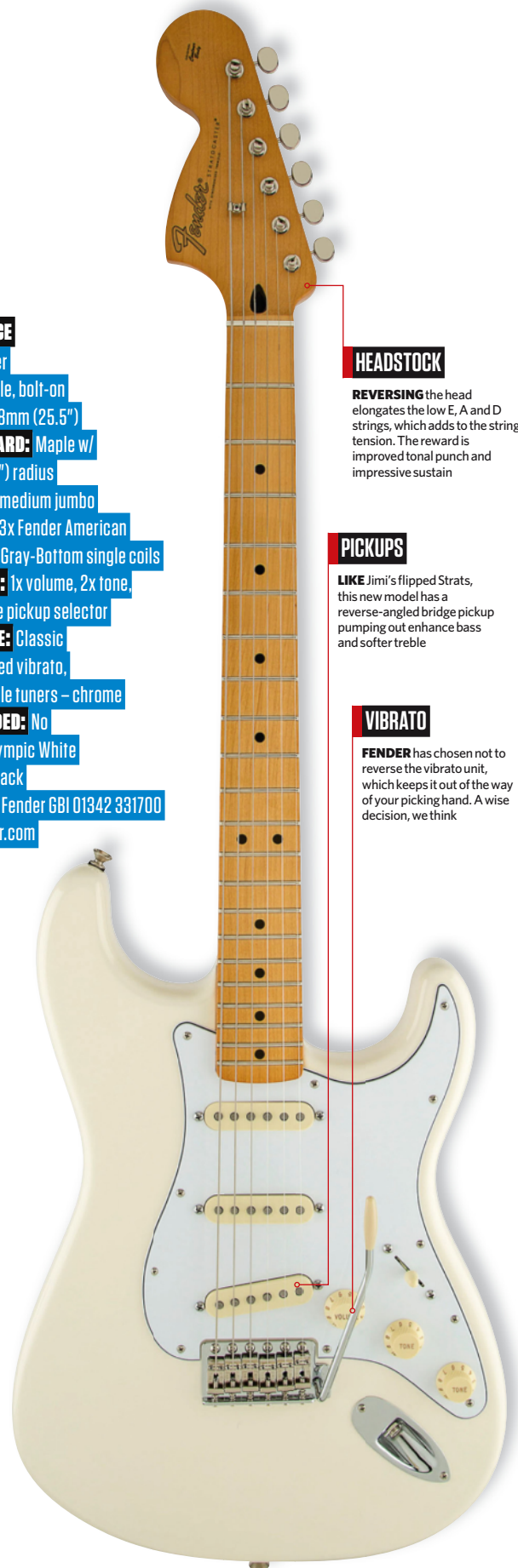
REVERSING the head elongates the low E, A and D strings, which adds to the string tension. The reward is improved tonal punch and impressive sustain

PICKUPS

LIKE Jimi's flipped Strats, this new model has a reverse-angled bridge pickup pumping out enhance bass and softer treble

VIBRATO

FENDER has chosen not to reverse the vibrato unit, which keeps it out of the way of your picking hand. A wise decision, we think





Grading on a curve

How we learned to love a flatter Strat

Back when Jimi Hendrix was plying his trade, Fender guitars came spec'd with a 7.25-inch fingerboard radius. This curvy profile was perfectly fine for fretting chords and banging out riffs, but it made it difficult to achieve a low action compared with the flatter 12-inch 'boards of Gibson Les Pauls and SGs. The basic idea is the higher the number the flatter the 'board, and you'll find many modern rock guitars boasting a 12-inch to 14-inch radius. These days, Fender supplies most of its guitars - including its Custom Shop Time Machine models - with a 9.5-inch radius fingerboard that, as demonstrated by our Jimi Hendrix Stratocaster, allows a low action without the worry of string bends choking out above the 12th fret. Installing fatter frets also improves the string-bending performance. You can only imagine that Jimi would have loved the feel of these 9.5-inch radius guitars, but he did pretty damn good with what he had.

bridge unit is bright and bold yet never shrill, even with the amp's gain whacked right up. The classic 'in-between' sounds are so iconically glassy, you can almost smell the Windolene. The real star, however, is the middle pickup. Run solo, it produces a thick addictive bark that works great for clean and lightly overdriven rhythm parts.

While some have grumbled, we're glad the vibrato arm position wasn't reversed. Hendrix-mad Stevie Ray Vaughan was a fan of that modification, but we reckon it



Jimi's signature adorns the back of the flipped peghead



In addition to the neck, the bridge pickup is also flipped around

works best where it is. As for those harder-to-reach tuners, it's a small price to pay for the tonal treasure. Besides, this Strat never lost its tuning once, and we played it a lot.

Knowing how George Best laced up his football boots won't make you a genius on the pitch, and even this guitar's smart tweaks won't magically transform you into Jimi Hendrix. But don't dismiss this latest repackaging of a 61-year-old design as a cynical marketing exercise. The enhanced punch of the bottom strings combined with

the lighter tension and softer treble in the high E and B, delivered through those exceptional pickups, might just turn everything you think you want from a Stratocaster on its head.

Ed Mitchell

SUMMARY	FEATURES								
	SOUND QUALITY								
	VALUE FOR MONEY								
	BUILD QUALITY								
	PLAYABILITY								
OVERALL RATING		★★★★★							



The neckplate bears Jimi's visage as a mark of authenticity

FENDER CLASSIC SERIES '70S STRATOCASTER £659

If you don't fancy all the reversed malarkey of the Hendrix Strat, try the more traditional layout of the big-headed 70s bruiser. It's available in a choice of finishes, including Olympic White with a maple or rosewood 'board.

SQUIER VINTAGE MODIFIED '70S STRATOCASTER £290

Despite its modest price tag, the Vintage Modified model has all the cool of the big headstock-era Strats. It comes loaded with a trio of Duncan Designed single coils.

FENDER DICK DALE SIGNATURE STRATOCASTER £2,709

The King of the Surf Guitar's Custom Shop model is remarkably close to the spec of Jimi's Strats.

