

FENDER OFFSET SERIES DUO-SONIC HS

£509

A forgotten 60s classic is reborn...

The original mouse that roared, the Duo-Sonic is, a short-scale student model that has become highly prized for its excellent playability and tone. Designed for kids with small hands and a tight budget, it was launched in 1956 before receiving a slight makeover in '59. The Mexican-made Offset Series HS version is based on the '64 Duo-Sonic II, which was basically a hardtail version of the then-new vibrato-toting Mustang model.

The Duo-Sonic's slab alder body, flawless in sparkly Surf Green, features the classic offset Fender waist that gives the series its name. While original Duo-

prevent even the sweatiest of hands from getting stuck.

Before we plug in, we have to say, we've encountered guitars at more than twice the price that don't play anywhere near as well as this thing does. Oh, and it doesn't matter what size your hands are. Straight from the box, it impresses with a low, buzz and choke-free action via its slim C neck profile, fat frets and factory-fitted 0.010 to 0.046 gauge strings. The tuning stability is faultless, too.

While Jimi Hendrix played a Duo-Sonic early in his career, it was Nirvana's Kurt Cobain that sparked the huge interest in Fender student models when he thrashed his way through a bunch

FF GUITARS AT TWICE THE PRICE DON'T PLAY AS WELL AS THIS

Sonics came with three-saddle bridges, the HS has a six-saddle hardtail with through-body stringing for better intonation and action adjustment. The three-ply white/black/white scratchplate also plays host to a chrome-tipped three-position pickup selector switch and knurled (aka easy-grip) volume and tone knobs servicing two pickups, a neck single coil plus a bridge humbucker – something original SS-format Duo-Sonics could only dream of. The latter is also coil-splittable via the push/pull tone knob.

The 610mm (24-inch) bolt-on maple neck is complimented by a string-bending-friendly 241mm (9.5-inch) radius rosewood fingerboard, 22 medium jumbo frets and a set of modern-looking tuners. While the small headstock has a glossy look, the back of the neck is coated in a satin finish to

of vintage Mustangs in the early 90s. Kurt liked to modify his guitars, hence his humbucker-boosted short-scale 'signature' Jag-Stang, Mustang and Jaguar models. He also tweaked his 'Stang vibratos to make 'em hardtails. So, the Duo-Sonic HS is pretty close to what Kurt was into.

There is another important factor at play here. Dropping the scale length from the 648mm (25.5 inches) found on Fender's Strat and Tele models doesn't just make the Duo-Sonic's strings a bit easier to bend. Tonally, its scale retains some of the brightness and bottom-end twang of a Strat and Tele, especially if you use 0.010 or higher gauge strings, yet you also get a chunkier rhythm sound. So, while this guitar's pickups sound fat, there's maximum note separation, no matter how thick the filth is. That clarity is

1 NECK Thanks to its slim, short-scale neck, the Offset Series Duo-Sonic HS is one of the easiest playing guitars that we've ever encountered

2 KILLER TONE Like Kurt Cobain's favourite Fenders, the Duo-Sonic has been modified with a humbucker in the bridge position. The pickup has a coil-split to offer humbucking and single-coil tones

3 UPGRADES Original Duo-Sonic hardtail bridges had three saddles. The new model has six, and combined with through-body stringing, it offers better intonation and action adjustment than the 60s design

AT A GLANCE

BODY: Alder
NECK: Maple, bolt-on
SCALE: 610mm (24")
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood
FRETS: 22 medium jumbo
PICKUPS: 1x Duo-Sonic humbucker (bridge), 1x Duo-Sonic single coil (neck)
CONTROLS: Master volume, master tone w/ push/pull coil split for humbucker, 3-way pickup selector switch
HARDWARE: Chrome six-saddle hardtail Strat bridge with thru-body stringing, Fender standard cast machineheads and knurled flat top control knobs
LEFT-HANDED: No
FINISH: Surf Green (as reviewed), Daphne Blue and Black
CONTACT: Fender GBI 01342 331700
www.fender.com





Meet the family!

Introducing the rest of the new Offset Series...

While our Duo-Sonic's 'HS' tag denotes its humbucker/single coil-fuelled tonal palette, the new Offset Series also includes a more traditional twin-single coil version with a maple 'board at the same £509 price point. In addition to this there's a bass – the Mustang PJ Bass (loaded with Precision and Jazz Bass pickups at £759) – and a pair of hardtail Mustang guitars, priced at £629. Choose between the twin-single coil version with a maple 'board, or a rosewood 'board model with twin P-90s. Now, you might be thinking, 'Er, isn't a hardtail Mustang just a Duo-Sonic?' Well yes, but they also feature classic Mustang details, such as chrome control plates, pearloid scratchplates and big 70s-style headstocks. If you really need the vibrato of the classic 60s spec, however, check out the Squier Vintage Modified Mustang (£335).

further boosted when you coil-split the bridge 'bucker.

If we had to use a song to describe the tonal range of the bridge pickup, we'll have *Smells Like Teen Spirit*, please. A clean setting here echoes the clattering rhythm voice of the song's intro while a fuzz box unleashes a racket not unlike the heavy sound Kurt craved. If it sounds like we're typecasting this guitar then rest assured the Duo-Sonic is versatile enough to handle country picking, surf, indie, classic rock, whatever. Plus, the neck pickup warms

things up perfectly for clean or dirty blues lead (blues-rockers Rory Gallagher and Johnny Winter owned Duo-Sonics, after all) or jazz chords.

An original 60s Duo-Sonic II will cost you about a grand; and you can double that estimate for a Desert Sand-finished 50s model in good condition. With our little HS, Fender has taken the stuff that makes those vintage classics so desirable – the shorter scale, lightweight body and slim neck – and hot-rodded it with modern elements – big frets, 241mm

(9.5-inch) fingerboard radius and coil-splittable humbucker – that enhance the performance and tone. At £509, this guitar already smells like a bargain, but shop around and you'll get an even better deal on this little slab of tonal nirvana.

Ed Mitchell

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



The Duo-Sonic veers from the classic spec with a very welcome bridge humbucker



The Duo-Sonic's short scale makes bending a dream

ALSO TRY...

SQUIER VINTAGE MODIFIED JAGUAR

The Jaguar shares the ultra-playable 610mm (24-inch) scale of the Duo-Sonic, but in this case, you get a couple of single coils and a vintage vibrato unit



£330

G&L TRIBUTE SERIES FALLOUT

This 25.5-inch scale humbucker/P-90-loaded beast is a reboot of the G&L SC-2 model that Leo Fender based on his original Mustang/Duo-Sonic II design



£349

VINTAGE V6 CUSTOM SPEC

No points for originality here, but this 'tribute' to a classic does offer a wide tonal palette thanks to its bridge humbucker and twin-single coil line-up



£309