



FIRST PLAY



PRS SE SANTANA STANDARD
£545

What Is It? Start-up all mahogany signature model that's made in Indonesia



PRS TREMONTI STANDARD
£545

What Is It? Affordable version of long-time PRS endorsee's Indonesian-made signature



Upping the Standards

PRS only make blingy guitars for people with money to burn do they? Well, the release of these entry-level-aimed SE Standards entirely disputes that

Words Dave Burrluck Photography Adam Gasson

The term 'Standard' might be applied to the most coveted glued-neck guitar there is but in traditional PRS lexicography, 'Standard' means without a maple top to differentiate it from the Custom. Today, while there are no Standards in the USA Core lineup, they form a major part of the more rock 'n' roll S2 line where these all-mahogany guitars are also ID'd by classic dot inlays rather than the trademark PRS birds. As we move further down the price scale the offshore-made SE line has a trio of Standards (245, Standard 24, and Standard 24 Multi-Foil) plus two new signature models, the 2018 Santana and Tremonti Standards we see here. And with the exception of that Multi-Foil model, the big difference is the price, having been made in Indonesia, as opposed to Korea.

The new Santana Standard isn't outwardly a simpler version of the SE Santana. Yes, it doesn't have the figured maple veneer

1. The latest pickups to grace the SE Santana and our SE Santana Standard models are 'S' versions of Santana's original spec. The bridge has a measured DCR of 12.68 kohms; the neck is 7.66k. Both have four-conductor wiring if you want to split them



over solid maple top; it's spec'd simply as mahogany but through the quite classic see-thru Cherry gloss finish you can clearly see that top and back aren't from the same piece, or even the same tree. The top appears to be one-piece of rather classic-looking mahogany with its small grain flecks; the back is three pieces of a much more striped wood; and the neck is a longitudinal laminate of three pieces, excluding the headstock widening wings. Sure, the non-standard SE Santana has a three-piece back of off-centre joined pieces but in its natural gloss it does look like

mahogany; the neck is one-piece (excluding those headstock wings) and has a diagonal grain viewed from the top of the head.

And while the more expensive guitar is binding free – the top's edge is natural as you'd expect – this Standard version has cream binding around the top edge and the fingerboard, moving it further still away from the classic PRS recipe.

Both Standards employ rosewood fingerboards that appear lighter and more striped than the non-Standard models. Another change is the 22 frets of the Standard as opposed to the 24 of the existing SE Santana (both have a 'short' 622mm/24.5-inch scale length), like his originals, while bird inlays on both are milky pearloid. Less obviously, another difference is the fret wire; they share a 2.7mm width but those on the Standards are considerably higher – there's also a different cream coloured nut material.

Hardware appears identical across both our Standard models and the more expensive signatures. The tuners are non-locking and quite generic looking, while the vibratos are in fact the same as those used on the USA S2 line. The top plate (steel) is cast, not machined like the Core vibratos; the block is steel, not brass; and the saddles appear to be sintered (powdered metal), giving a texture to the nickel plating. The arm is push fit as usual and tension-adjustable by a small grub screw – the arm

2. Both these new Standards feature fingerboard and body binding. The fretwire is also a little higher than the more expensive non-Standard versions

3. PRS is one of the very few brands that proudly displays not only the country of origin but also the factory used for its offshore models. Oddly, USA-made PRS guitars don't display 'Made in the USA'

There's very little to differentiate in feel or sound between these and the more expensive signatures





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THE STANDARD BACKGROUND

The first wave of all-mahogany Indonesian-made SE Standards launched back in late 2014 and included a Standard 24 and 22, Singlecut Standard and Tremonti Standard, with the Santana Standard and P-90 equipped Santana Standard Special appearing slightly later into 2015.

“They were originally developed for the third world markets,” explains PRS Europe’s MD, Gavin Mortimer, but a range that kicked off, back then, at £399 (including a gigbag) soon found its way into the USA and European markets. Instead of using their long-time partner for the SE line, World Music in Korea, the Standards came from Indonesia’s PT Wildwood facility that, certainly around the time of their launch, was also building for Yamaha, Schecter, Fender and ESP among others.

As of 2018, however, SEs heading to the USA are now being produced entirely in Indonesia by Cor-tek (Cort). Europe, meanwhile, is staying with World Music (Korean) and PT Wildwood (Indonesia) factories for the foreseeable future.



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isn’t stainless steel and is a slightly smaller diameter than the USA Core spec. Rather oddly, the Standards have three vibrato springs, the non-Standard models, four.

The Santana Standard also places its controls in typical PRS style; the non-Standard Santana reverts to original style with its distant and quite closely spaced master volume and tone. Internally there is little surprise, with a treble bleed capacitor on the volume, plus both zebra humbuckers have four-conductor wiring should you want to add your own coil-splits.

The Tremonti Standard follows a similar style although in its opaque black finish, again cream bound, you can’t see any wood at all. It could be made of concrete for all we know as it weighs in at a whopping 4.41kg/9.7lb. By comparison our non-Standard Tremonti is more normal at 8.8lb while the Santana Standard weighs in at 7.7lb. That said, the Singlecut is, by design, a weightier piece due to its shape and thicker depth body. While original SE Singlecuts had a thin 45mm deep body – the USA models are just under 60mm – here, like more recent spec, the Tremonti Standard measures a shade under 55mm overall, the Korean version 56mm. Similarly, the SE Santana shoots for 47mm, with the Standard version measuring 45mm.

The Mark Tremonti model is a unique piece and is the only Singlecut with a vibrato (with the exception of the Bigsby-equipped S2 Starla) anywhere in the PRS lineup. There’s little doubt that most of us prefer our single-cuts (PRS or other brands) in a more classic hardtail format yet it gives the Tremonti considerable appeal. However, with no options and just one colour, what you see is what you get.

The main differences – physical shape aside – to the Standard are a thinner depthed ‘wide thin’ neck profile, the pickups and the four-control layout in the diamond style (as opposed to Gibson) as featured on the first PRS Singlecuts that appeared in 2000. Unlike some PRS single-cuts the wiring here includes a treble bleed on each volume control and again the pickups have four-conductor wiring.

Feel & Sounds

Whether or not it’s the pre-production shape, the lack of figured maple or indeed the added binding, this Santana Standard just doesn’t really look or feel like a PRS. The neck is spec’d with a ‘wide fat’ profile but it feels more generic, lacking both the fuller depth and slightly V’d shape in its lower positions. It’s not bad, just slightly different.

Plug it in after the non-Standard SE Santana and the sounds are certainly a lot closer than you might expect from the slightly different construction. While it might not nail the depth, sonic detail and fatter voice of the USA Core model, there’s plenty of rock kick from the bridge contrasted by a nicely vintage-y neck humbucker that really captures a vocal PRS voice. If you were to add coil-splits here you’d have an extremely versatile guitar that spans classic rock to metal with surprising soul and blues from that neck pickup. We certainly prefer the control placement here as opposed to the non-Standard model and the tone is nicely graduated to pull down the highs a little from the bridge, especially with a bright-edged Marshall-y amp voice. Ultimately it’s a great little guitar.

There’s extra beef to the Tremonti and it’s not just that weight. Like the Santana there’s plenty of almost cocked wah midrange clout from the bridge that adds juice and sizzle to your front-end, combined with a heft in the low-end that any good single-cut guitar should possess. But this bluster is again parried by the much more vintage-y neck voice that drops us back a little in time. The Standard version exhibits slightly less attacking upper midrange than the SE Tremonti but again the sounds are

4. Both this latest SE Standard and existing SE Tremonti Custom use 'S' pickups. "The 'S' means that they are not made at the PRS factory," says Judy. "They are designed at our factory [by Paul Reed Smith] and made to our specs [by G&B in Korea]. We did update everything as we moved from the previous 'SE' versions to these new 'S' versions using some tricks and tips that Paul has been learning over time"



close. In fact, we might go for the bridge pickup of the Standard paired with the neck pickup on the non-Standard in terms of our favourite sounds.

Despite the near £300 price difference, these Standards hold up extremely well to their non-Standard stablemates. The Santana Standard has a lovely resonance and sustain that rises very fast from the attack: with too many guitars in this price point you'll hear a lot of bright attack that isn't followed with quite so full a rise. This is good guitar-making: from the sharp finishing to the hugely consistent set-up

across the four guitars. However, the higher fretwire of the Standard models does have noticeable impact: slippery and very smooth and modern, while with both the non-Standard models you feel more of the fretboard. Again, it's slightly different.

Like the other SE models there are no locking tuners here and you certainly need to be careful how you attach your strings – really stretch them in, not least with the added upbend of the Tremonti. We tightened the tuner buttons too which, while not changing the function, really does firm things up. And when

5. With its opaque, black-only finish, the added cream binding works very well despite its weight. Mark Tremonti once commented on Singlecuts, saying that he liked them the "heavier the better"



a chassis is working as well as this, the potential for modding and fine-tuning is obvious, especially on this Santana Standard, which remains quite unique: a 22-fret Santana shape but with a conventional PRS control layout.

Verdict

For a company that, from its inception, has been constantly criticised for the price of its instruments, these Standards almost feel like an impulse buy. With no gigbag and just the colours you see we're hardly spoilt for choice but while you might have expected a 'cheaper' unbound satin finish with dot inlay specification, there's very little to actually differentiate in feel or sound between these and the non-Standard signatures. If they feel perhaps a little more generic that's hardly surprising, but once again it's build quality that PRS is flagging up here. Getting two guitars at this price in for review (plus two more for comparison) and not having to touch a thing in terms of set-up is pretty much a first.

Assuming the over-heavy Tremonti is a blip and not indicative of all the production models, both these Standards not only get you on the PRS ladder, but for existing PRS fans they're good knockabout guitars that won't make you blub inconsolably when they get dinged in action. They are also seriously good 'spares' and rather good platforms for any keen modders. Standard? These guitars are anything but. **G**

6. This vibrato is the same one used on the USA S2 models as well as the other SEs. So where is it made? "We do not use any bridges that are made in the USA anymore, except for the occasional Private Stock or special artist guitar build," says PRS Director of Marketing, Judy Schafer. "We make sure we are delivering quality and value more than we are worrying about Korea vs Japan vs Germany vs USA"



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PRS SE SANTANA STANDARD

PRICE: £545
ORIGIN: Indonesia
TYPE: Double-cutaway solidbody electric
BODY: Mahogany
NECK: Mahogany, wide fat profile, glued-in
SCALE LENGTH: 622mm (24.5")
NUT/WIDTH: Friction reducing/42.43mm
FINGERBOARD: Bound rosewood, pearloid bird inlays, 254mm (10") radius
FRETS: 22, medium
HARDWARE: PRS patented vibrato (cast), PRS designed tuners—nickel-plated
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 52.5mm
ELECTRICS: PRS Santana 'S' Treble and Bass humbuckers, three-way toggle pickup selector switch, master volume and tone
WEIGHT (KG/LB): 3.5/7.7
OPTIONS: None. PRS SE gigbag adds £69
RANGE OPTIONS: The 24-fret SE Santana costs £849, including gigbag
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISHES: Vintage Cherry only (as reviewed)

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PROS: Price, build quality, girthsome sounds, excellent playability and modding potential

CONS: Aside from colour choice and you'll need a gigbag, nothing



PRS SE TREMONTI STANDARD

PRICE: £545
ORIGIN: Indonesia
TYPE: Single-cutaway solidbody electric
BODY: Mahogany
NECK: Mahogany, wide thin profile, glued-in
SCALE LENGTH: 635mm (25")
NUT/WIDTH: Friction reducing/42.7mm
FINGERBOARD: Bound rosewood, pearloid bird inlays, 254mm (10") radius
FRETS: 22, medium
HARDWARE: PRS patented vibrato (cast) with up-route, PRS designed tuners—nickel-plated
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 52.5mm
ELECTRICS: PRS Tremonti 'S' Treble and Bass humbuckers, three-way toggle pickup selector switch, individual pickup volume and tone controls
WEIGHT (KG/LB): 4.41/9.7
OPTIONS: None. PRS SE gigbag adds £69
RANGE OPTIONS: The SE Tremonti Custom costs £849, including gigbag
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISHES: Black only (as reviewed)

PROS: Ditto the Santana Standard

CONS: The weight of our sample is excessive, again there's only one colour and you'll pay more for a gigbag

8/10