



Retro, Revisited

Once upon a time, Fender's Jazzmaster and Jaguar were unloved ugly ducklings. Not any more.

Elevated into Fender's American Professional series and being cloned by many other makers, the classic 'offsets' are bigger than ever

Words Dave Burrluck

Photography Joseph Branstor





FENDER AMERICAN PROFESSIONAL JAZZMASTER & JAGUAR BOTH £1,539

CONTACT **Fender Musical Instruments EMEA** PHONE **01342 331700** WEB **www.fender.com**

What You Need To Know

1 What's the deal here?

For 2017, Fender's long-running American Standard range has changed to the American Professional. We looked at the first raft of models in issue 416; here we have the Jazzmaster and Jaguar.

2 There's already plenty of these offsets in Fender's range. Do we really need more?

There's little doubt that this style has never been more popular. That said, there's still a large disparity in Strat and Teles vs offsets in the number of instruments Fender currently offers: the company lists 53 Strats and 36 Teles, but just eight models of both the offsets.

3 Who are these aimed at, then?

Like the rest of the American Professional range, these are not vintage-specific instruments but include a raft of changes and tweaks. They are modern mainstream designs. Both have simplified electronics as well – a Jazzmaster and Jaguar for those of us who don't get on with the vintage style?

So many of us think Fender got it so right with the Stratocaster and Telecaster and that the later Jazzmaster and Jaguar squarely missed the point. 59 years later, the Jazzmaster's dual control circuit, for example, still leaves many of us baffled, and the short-scale Jaguar, with a similarly convoluted control setup, has many of us asking, 'Why?'

In truth, both have been garnering their own fans and players for many, many years becoming the almost default axe for anyone remotely 'indie': the anti-Fender for the anti-guitar hero. This continued rise in these offsets' fortunes is clearly evidenced by their elevation into the 2017 Fender American Professional range – previously the American Standard range, which never featured either guitar, despite being the backbone of Fender's range for the past couple of decades.

As with the other models in the new range (see issue 416), fingerboard material is colour dependent. So the Jazzmaster comes in new colours: Sonic Gray, with a parchment scratchplate, and Mystic Seafoam, with a mint green scratchplate, but only with a maple fingerboard. The two classic colours – 3-Colour Sunburst (with mint green 'plate) and Olympic White (with black 'plate) – both come with rosewood 'boards. The Jaguar swaps Mystic Seafoam for Antique Olive with a maple 'board and a black scratchplate. Both models also have revised (simplified) electronics and the bridges and vibrato on both have been upgraded in line with Johnny Marr's innovative work on his signature Jaguar.

Then we have other Professional upgrades such as new pickups, modern 'Deep C'-shaped neck profiles, bone nuts,

narrow-tall fret wire... there's a treble bleed capacitor and resistor circuit on the volume controls, not to mention the neat lightweight moulded hardshell case that's included. Price-wise, they top the range, along with the dual humbucking Deluxe Telecaster model.

In the flesh, these modern-spec pieces feel immediately ready to go, especially the vibratos with their new screw-in arms that stay put where you want them, and the Mustang-style solid brass saddles that aren't individually height adjustable, but, via different radii, achieve an arch that matches the modern 241mm (9.5-inch) fingerboard radius. The modern neck design has the 22nd fret on an overhang (on the Jazzmaster only; the Jaguar always had 22 frets), truss rod adjustment is behind the nut, plus there's the easy-to-adjust micro-tilt feature that makes neck shims a thing of the past.

The profoundly different thing about both, compared with the original designs, is the electronics. The Jazzmaster completely ditches its original dual rhythm/lead circuit feature going for a three-way toggle pickup selector on the upper, not lower, tip of the scratchplate with master volume and tone controls above the output jack, as normal. As ever, all the controls are placed on the scratchplate, while the two classic large rectangular single coils mount directly to the body via the four screws that also allow height and tilt adjustment.

The Jaguar again ditches its dual circuit but retains its trio of chromed metal control and switch plates. The upper bass-side plate that originally housed the rhythm circuit controls now holds a lone two-position slide switch to voice the pickups (when



1. These look like standard Jaguar pickups, but a different material is used for the 'sawtooth' surrounds contributing to a more hot 'single coil-meets-humbucker' tonality

2. Borrowed from the Johnny Marr Jaguar, the bridge saddles here are chrome-plated brass and follow the Mustang's design

3. More upgrades here, including an improved stop/lock and a screw-in arm. The feel is still very retro, though: more 'vague' than a Strat's vibrato



both are on), in- or out-of-phase. The upper treble-side plate, which originally held the pickup on/off switches and the low-cut filter switch, now offers us a four-way lever pickup switch, voicing the three standard selections – bridge, both (in parallel), neck plus both pickups in series – that we've seen on various Telecasters, plus, of course, on the Johnny Marr Jaguar.

Sounds

Neither example is the lightest we've ever played and although the slightly larger body (compared with a Strat) should add a little weight, the Jaguar, especially, is on the heavy side, some 16 per cent weightier than the Jazzmaster. Both feel bigger, too, compared with a Strat, especially with the larger headstocks.

Despite the unified neck shape and frets (as we pointed out in our previous review, the wire is pretty wide despite its 'narrow' description), the combination of the scale

length difference and the fingerboard wood does give quite a different perceived feel. For example, the bridge of the longer-scaled Jazzmaster sits around 10mm lower on the body, its 16th fret just slightly north of the tip of the body heel. The Jaguar, conversely, has its 17th fret virtually over that heel tip, adding to its slightly more compact feel.

Neck backs on both are satin (the Jazzmaster's maple fingerboard face is gloss, like both headstock faces), and as we reported before, this is a really good rounded handful that gets bigger as you move up, but not excessively so. These are mainstream guitars and we prefer this profile to the previous American Standards.

But the different feels and weights, not to mention scale, all play their part and the Jaguar seems a little plinky and short in the Fender bright and ringing department. The Jazzmaster restores that singing, zingy sustain you'd expect. The bridge/vibrato setup adds to the sustain character and

there's a slight honkiness in certain places on the 'boards on both that you don't hear on the more direct-sounding Strat or Tele.

That acoustic character certainly translates plugged in. The Jazzmaster is beautifully new-string bright – the least 'jazz' guitar you'll ever hear! – and a good foil to either of our reference Strats and Teles, which, to our ears, have a more identifiable sound. The Jazzmaster is Fender for sure but less direct and 'choppy' than our reference Strats, without the 'honk' of the Tele's bridge and with a slightly bigger, wider neck voice. Think two-pickup Strat with a bit extra and you're pretty much there, although with the mix, there's almost too much high-end sizzle – we can't help thinking a tone control for each pickup would work. The tone circuit actually works well on the lone pickups, though, really taming those highs for what many would consider a more classic, woodier, darker Jazzmaster voice. Clean or



with a little hair, amp tremolo and reverb, you're in twang heaven. The strapped-on feel is actually very comfortable, too, and here's a wonderful rhythm guitar with bounce and funk.

Plugged into the same dual amp test rig, the Jaguar is again comfortable on the strap – despite its extra heft – and the combination of the scale and more flexible string feel and shorter sustain we mentioned, not to forget the pickups, offers a subtly darker, more rounded fundamental voice that suggests those bell-like percussive tones of early spec PAFs. If that's your bag, the three core sounds here are beautiful. The fourth series voice can sound a little too big: it ups the volume and while it's a useful 'extra gear' for higher position leads, it's almost too wide and waffly, not to mention dark, for heavy gains.

But, of course, that's where both of these guitars have made their mark. With a crunchy Brit voice from our Yamaha THR and a Vox AC10 running together, kicking in a little boost on both, the Jazzmaster needs some high-end taming – the bridge is really quite vicious. Plug the Jaguar into the same setup and its slightly gnarlier, rounder

high-end suits us more. Your taste may differ. And, yes, if you're going to run some outright filth and fuzz, the out-of-phase switch works for a hugely visceral grunge attack, but unless that's your bag, that low-cut filter from the Johnny Marr Jag would certainly help the series link to just clean up the lows a little.

Verdict

With apologies to die-hard Jazzmaster and Jaguar fans, we suspect many of us will be coming to these from their Strats and Teles: a third or indeed fourth Fender voice. Unlike their original incarnations, both are a more straightforward drive and play, and feel to a great extent like modern pieces. Yet both retain a 'retro' vibe, not least with that long, high vibrato arm with its subtle waggle – it's very different from the almost touch-sensitive Strat vibrato. This pair provides probably the widest difference, too – a rosewood 'board Jazzmaster and maple 'board Jaguar might well narrow the gap – but it's that difference that makes them both hugely valid in terms of sound. It might be time to change your opinion on these less feted Fender designs. **G**



4. No rhythm circuit here, just a three-way toggle, master volume and tone controls. Like the other Pro series guitars in the range, there's a capacitor/resistor treble bleed circuit on the volume control

5 The pickups look like the originals, but under the plastic covers are taller magnets and a taller, narrower, more Strat-like coil

6. While the Jazzmaster's classic large headstock is retained, in the American Professional spec we get staggered height tuners and a bone nut



Pro Pickups

Designed by Fender veteran Michael Frank-Braun, the new pickups for these models are purpose-designed to expand on vintage performance. But unlike the other single coils for the American Pros, designed by Tim Shaw, which use a mixed magnet structure, both sets here use Alnico 5 rod magnets, instead of the wide, flat coil of the original Jazzmaster pickup. "I used taller magnets and changed the winding height, which gave me more volume and midrange for neck position and a hotter bridge pickup," explains Michael. "Technically, these are closer to a Strat pickup, extending the tonal range for this instrument. We get more midrange punch but with definition. In the middle position, the set is hum-cancelling."

The main tweak to the Jag's pickups is the material used for the 'claw' surround that is "changed from steel to nickel-silver, which has less influence to the magnetic field and inductance. This allowed me to raise the turns for the neck and provide a hotter bridge pickup, which resulted in more overall gain and a mid-frequency boost... This pickup set produces, from clean to distortion, a wide range of sounds never heard before from a Jaguar."



FENDER AMERICAN PROFESSIONAL JAGUAR

PRICE: £1,539 (inc case)
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: Offset double-cutaway solidbody electric
BODY: Alder
NECK: Maple, modern 'deep C' profile, bolt-on
SCALE LENGTH: 610mm (24")
NUT: Bone/43.2mm
FINGERBOARD: Maple, black dot markers, 241mm (9.5") radius
FRETS: 22, narrow tall
HARDWARE: Nickel/chromed-plated 9.5" radius Jazzmaster/Jaguar Bridge with brass Mustang saddle, vintage-style floating vibrato with lock button and screw-in arm, Fender standard cast/sealed staggered tuners
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 56mm
ELECTRICS: 2x Michael Frank-Braun designed Fender V-Mod Jaguar single coils, 4-position lever pickup selector switch, 2-position slide switch (phase), master volume (w/ treble bleed) and tone controls
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 4.24/9.33
OPTIONS: Colour only
RANGE OPTIONS: For classic vintage performance, try the American Vintage '65 Jaguar (£1,699) and the 'hot rod' Classic Player Jaguar Special (£989); for a more modern take, there's the Johnny Marr Jaguar (£1,959)
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISHES: 3-Color Sunburst, Sonic Gray, Antique Olive, Olympic White

8/10

PROS Upgrades from American Standard; bridge/pickups; simplified electronics; enhanced sounds

CONS Not for vintage-obsessed offset fans, either in function or sound



FENDER AMERICAN PROFESSIONAL JAZZMASTER

PRICE: £1,539 (inc case)
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: Offset double-cutaway solidbody electric
BODY: Alder
NECK: Maple, modern 'deep C' profile, bolt-on
SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")
NUT: Bone/43.3mm
FINGERBOARD: Maple, black dot markers, 241mm (9.5") radius
FRETS: 22, narrow tall
HARDWARE: Nickel/chromed-plated Jazzmaster/Jaguar bridge with brass Mustang saddles, vintage-style floating vibrato with lock button and screw-in arm, Fender standard cast/sealed staggered tuners
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 56mm
ELECTRICS: 2x Fender V-Mod Jazzmaster single coils, 3-position toggle pickup selector switch, master volume (w/ treble bleed) and tone controls
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.65/8
OPTIONS: Colour only
RANGE OPTIONS: More vintage-style options are the Classic Player Jazzmaster Special (£989), the Road Worn '60s Jazzmaster (£1,089) and the American Vintage Jazzmaster (£1,699)
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISHES: 3-Color Sunburst, Sonic Gray, Mystic Seafoam, Olympic White

8/10

PROS Upgrades from American Standard; bridge/pickups; simplified electronics; Strat-style sounds

CONS Not for vintage-obsessed offset fans, either in function or sound