



**FENDER EOB SUSTAINER  
STRATOCASTER**  
£979

**What Is It?** A low-key signature model from Radiohead's modest Ed O'Brien

# To Infinity And Beyond

If you think signature models are just vanity projects with a scrawl on the headstock, meet an eminently playable artist-spec'd guitar with infinite appeal...

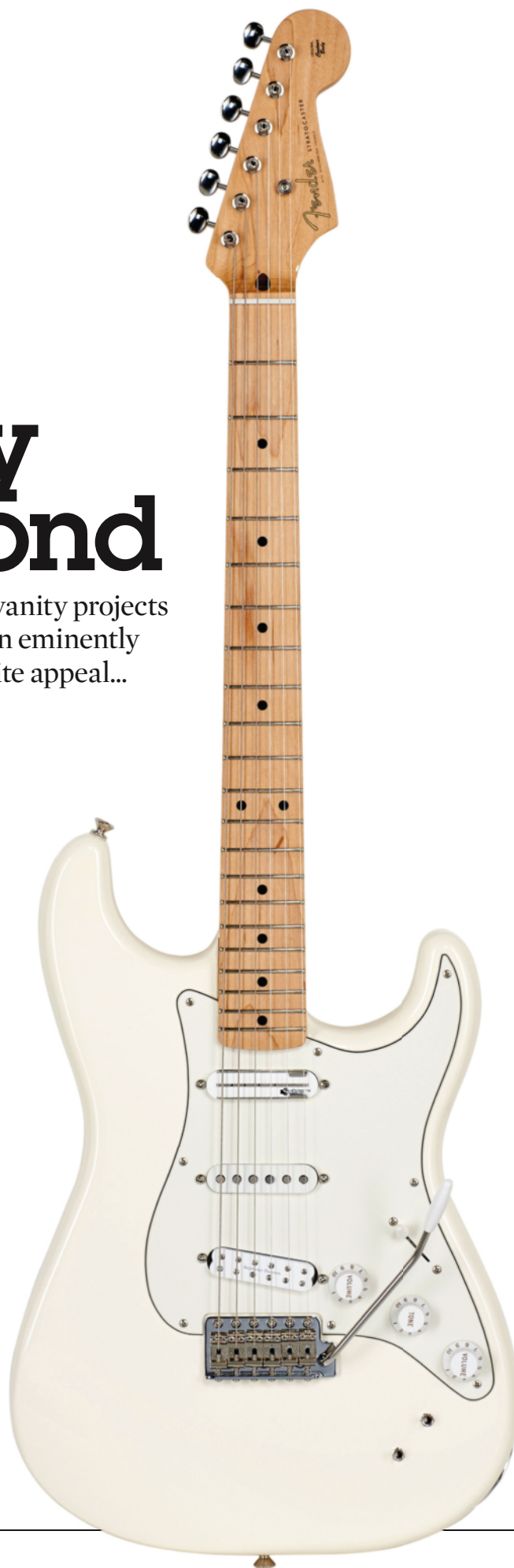
**Words** Ed Mitchell **Photograph** Olly Curtis

It's entirely possible that you could encounter and fall in love with the new Fender EOB Sustainer Stratocaster without realising it is, in fact, an artist signature model. The face behind the initials is Radiohead guitarist Ed O'Brien and his new guitar is the best Fender signature project since Johnny Marr set about redesigning the Jaguar.

Made at Fender's Ensenada plant in Mexico, the EOB features an alder body playing host to a flawless Olympic White polyurethane finish, three-ply white/black/white scratchplate and that classic 'synchronized' vibrato. The bolt-on 10/56V maple neck features a flatter-than-vintage 241mm (9.5") radius maple 'board, 21 'narrow tall' frets and a, mostly, satin urethane finish. Only the headstock face is glossy.

One of the most popular neck profiles requested on Fender Custom Shop models, the 10/56V is nowhere near as porky as the U profile featured on '54/'55 models, yet it carries more heft than the slim C necks found on late 50s and 60s Strats and Teles.

Back at the body end, you may have noticed that the classic recessed jack socket is missing. Back in 1983 Fender







**1.** There's no signature on this guitar but Ed O'Brien has included a 'Flower of Life' design on the neck plate. The distances between the spheres represents that between whole and semi-tones, apparently

**2.** The Sustainer might be the headline act but there's plenty of oomph from the Seymour Duncan JB Jr 'bucker

**3.** This Strat was born at Fender's plant in Mexico. The build quality is as high as we expect from the home of affordable modern classics like the Custom Shop designed Baja Telecaster

Hit a long string slide, let it sustain in Natural mode, then flick to Harmonic and listen to it slowly begin to squeal

launched a Strat model sans the recessed jack and one of the tone controls; on that occasion the tweaks were intended to cut costs. Here, the jackplate has been relocated to free up some valuable real estate on the EOB's body for the chunk of circuitry that powers the onboard Fernandes Sustainer system. Yep, the EOB offers the prospect of infinite sustain from its Fernandes-branded neck pickup. It's joined by a Seymour Duncan JB Jr single coil-sized humbucker at the bridge and a slightly overwound Fender Texas Special in the middle slot. So, this is a high spec guitar, but the only thing it doesn't come with is a load of rock star ego. Even Ed O'Brien's John Hancock doesn't appear anywhere on his guitar.

### Feel & Sounds

Ed O'Brien has used a black Fender Eric Clapton Signature Stratocaster, retro-fitted

with a Fernandes Sustainer, since 1996. That guitar has a V-profile neck making his choice of the 10/56V shape for his EOB model a no-brainer. The V profile is actually quite subtle and it morphs into a C shape as you approach the 12th fret making it supremely comfortable to navigate. We like Strats with fuller necks as it seems to offset the lack of grunt from the bridge pickup.

Of course, the EOB has a humbucking JB Jr in the bridge position so there's more weight in the tone here anyway. The JB Jr is bright and punchy when played clean and grows bolder when you expose it to some overdrive. It's fuller bodied than a regular Strat bridge pickup and that girth is also present in the mid-position Texas Special and the Fernandes unit which acts as a regular neck humbucker when not in sustain mode. All the classic Strat sounds are

4. Ed O'Brien's new baby is fitted with a Fernandes Sustainer pickup. This vibrates the strings for infinite sustain and the sound is pumped through the amp by the bridge pickup

5. The usual Strat jackplate has been dropped in favour of Sustainer switches: an on/off and a three position mode switch for Natural, Mix and Harmonic settings

6. The EOB comes spec'd with the highly desirable 10/56V bolt-on maple neck. The profile runs from a subtle V at the top nut to a C at the 12th fret and beyond



there, they're just a bit fatter 'round the middle.

The Sustainer is wired to a pair of switches, and a rotary 'intensity' control which occupies the space where the second tone knob on a regular Strat would be. The first switch is an on/off. Flick it on and the five-way pickup selector switch is bypassed; suddenly it's all about the Sustainer. The second switch selects between three Sustain modes: Natural, Mix and Harmonic. Natural simply sustains the note or chord that you're playing. Harmonic pumps out a feedback-style high-pitch note. Mix is a blend of both.

Ed uses the Sustainer to produce otherworldly synth-like sounds which we agree sound awesome. That said, we love what the sustain does for real guitar stuff. It's incredible for slide. Hit a long George Harrison-esque string slide, let it sustain in Natural mode, then flick to Harmonic and

listen to the note slowly begin to squeal. Do the same while playing regular lead. It's a blast. Try your hand at some pedal steel bends. If you add in a volume pedal and a splash of reverb, you'll get some authentic old school sounds. The thing is like an Ebow on steroids.

### Verdict

Chef Gordon Ramsey will tell you that every recipe should have a hero, the one ingredient that dominates a plate. Applying that theory to the EOB, the Fernandes Sustainer should be the undisputed champion here. In fact, it shares the winner's podium with that superb 10/56V neck profile. You see, bells and whistles aside, the EOB is just a damn good Strat and as such has the potential to snag punters no matter what noises they like to make. To paraphrase an old Radiohead song, anyone can play Ed's new guitar. **G**



## FENDER EOB SUSTAINER STRATOCASTER

**Price:** £979 (inc gigbag)

**Origin:** Mexico

**Type:** Twin-cutaway, solid body electric guitar

**Body:** Alder

**Neck:** Maple, bolt-on

**Scale length:** 648mm (25.5")

**Nut/width:** Synthetic bone/42mm

**Fingerboard:** Maple, 241mm (9.5")

**Frets:** 21, narrow tall

**Hardware:** 6-saddle vintage-style Synchronized vibrato and nickel-plated Kluson style tuners

**String spacing, bridge:** 54mm

**Electrics:** Seymour Duncan JB Jr humbucker, Fender Texas Special single coil, Fernandes Sustainer Driver humbucker, five-way lever pickup selector switch, master volume, master tone, Sustainer Intensity control, Sustainer on/off switch, Sustainer mode switch

**Weight (kg/lb):** 3.2/7.11

**Options:** None

**Range options:** The Eric Clapton Stratocaster (£1,929) with its active mid-boost, TBX tone circuits and Vintage Noiseless pickups

**Left handers:** Not this model

**Finishes:** Olympic White (as shown)

**Fender GBI**

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**[www.fender.com](http://www.fender.com)**



9/10

**PROS:** Great neck and the Sustainer opens up a world of possibilities. The sub-£1,000 price tag is a bargain for such an innovative Stratocaster

**CONS:** The Sustainer's novelty might wear off