



Fender® Deluxe  
CORONA, CA

Fender® Champ  
'57 CUSTOM - CORONA, CA

# FENDER '57 CUSTOM TWEED CHAMP & '57 CUSTOM TWEED DELUXE £939 & £1,639

Fender presents the glory of vintage tweed revamped for today's playing life, with a new set of amps that transport us right back to Fullerton, 1957

Words Nick Guppy Photography Joby Sessions

## What You Need To Know

- 1 What does 'tweed' refer to?**  
In general, it refers to amps produced by Fender roughly between 1948 and 1959. These were covered in a varnished yellow and black cotton twill, known to all as tweed, although most people particularly associate it with the 'Narrow Panel' amps made from around 1955. The circuit designs created by Fender during this era have served as the basis for many other guitar amps, and Fender tweeds are probably the most recorded of all amplifiers.
- 2 Why use an Alnico speaker?**  
It's a loudspeaker with a magnet made from an alloy of aluminium, nickel and cobalt. Although the magnet is just one component, Alnico loudspeakers are generally regarded as having a more detailed treble. They're also more expensive and less efficient; most Alnicos are rated at 30 watts or less.
- 3 What's special about the vintage capacitors?**  
Fender has recently introduced a whole range of Pure Vintage capacitors. The yellow ones are intended to be a replica of the paper, foil and resin Astron caps used in late-50s tweed amps. It's debatable as to how much of a difference these make, but they certainly look the part!

**F**rom 1955 to 1957, Fender made what would become some of the last changes to its so-called 'tweed' amplifier range, to arrive at the coveted narrow panel series that went on to become the template for so many other designs. The Bassman also changed from a 1x15 cabinet to a 4x10 in 1955, serving as the inspiration for another well-known amplification icon. However, despite the temporary fashion for big stacks and 100-watt tops, the small tweed Fender has remained indispensable, providing the tonal inspiration for countless gold albums and hit singles. Over the years, Fender has reissued both amps in various guises, but this year the company has chosen to push the boat out with a Summer NAMM debut of not one, but four Custom Shop tweed amps (also including the Custom '57 Pro and Twin), of which these two, the Champ and the Deluxe, are likely to be runaway hits.

Both combos are as close as can be faithful replicas of their original 1957 counterparts.

The cabinets are finger-jointed solid pine, with expertly fitted cotton twill covering, gold/brown grille cloth, period-correct badges, leather strap handles and metal glides. The chassis on both amps is chrome-plated steel, with slotted side panels to improve strength and assist in ventilation. Chickenhead knobs that go up to 12 adorn the control panels.

Inside, the electronics are fairly close to the originals, using a black eyelet board to support all the small components, with neat hand wiring to the valve bases and front and rear panel connections. Original Champs incorporated the on/off switch in the volume control; on the reissue, Fender has wisely added a separate toggle switch and a top-mounted fuse holder. Both combos use Fender's recently introduced Pure Vintage yellow coupling capacitors – re-engineered versions of the original paper, foil and resin Astrons, which some tweed aficionados consider to be crucial for the right tone. Other ingredients to Fender's updated





tweed recipe include Alnico loudspeakers – an eight-inch Weber on the Champ and an Eminence-built Fender Special Design 12-inch on the Deluxe – and re-worked tapers on the volume controls for improved controllability, which is particularly relevant to the Deluxe.

The control panels are as simple as ever: the Champ's has two input jacks and a volume control, while the Deluxe gets two pairs of sockets for its interactive instrument and microphone channels, plus separate channel volumes and a master tone control. The valve complements are authentic, too, with a 12AY7 in the V1 positions and 5Y3 rectifier valves. With the exception of a few safety changes, such

1. The Champ's single volume control governs a wide range of tweed tone that's ready-EQ'd by the eight-inch Weber loudspeaker for instant recording gratification

2. The Instrument and Microphone inputs are differently voiced and very interactive. It's also possible to jumper the inputs to have both channels running simultaneously



as no cloth-covered hook-up wire, both combos look like they just rolled off the old Fullerton production line.

### Sounds

Both amps power on with minimal background hum and hiss. Valve-rectified circuits take a little time for all the voltages to stabilise and after a few minutes the hum reduces to more than satisfactory levels. Both are fitted with a 12AY7 in the V1 position, which improves clean headroom at the expense of overall volume. This is the original valve specification, but many guitarists prefer to use the higher gain and more commonly available 12AX7, which will cause the amp to break up earlier, typically well under the halfway point on the volume control.

We tried out both amps with a variety of single-coil and humbucking guitars and, in simple circuits like these, the guitar has a very strong influence on the amp's behaviour and the character of individual instruments is more noticeable. Our Les Paul, for example, produced plenty of sustain and drive with both amps using a 12AX7 at lower volume settings, while a Strat fitted with regular low-ish output single coils still managed a respectable crunch. The microphone and instrument inputs on the Deluxe have quite different sounds; the instrument input has a generous treble boost, while the mic input is quite flat. We tried this with an archtop jazz guitar and got an authentic bebop tone with just a hint of growl (very Barney Kessel).

However, crank up the Deluxe with a decent Les Paul and you're in blues-rock central, with a fat midrange, toothy overdrive and harmonic-laden sustain

### The Rivals

If you want to see the British take on small Class A combos, check out Vox's AC4HW1 (approx. £699), the hand-wired version of the giant-killing AC4 combo. A single EL84 punches out around four watts of totally British tone. Also try the 20-watt Tone King Imperial MkII (approx. £1,999), with two channels, reverb, tremolo and the built-in Ironman attenuator – one of the best you'll hear. Another superlative mid-sized all-valve combo is Suhr's Bella (approx. £1,499), which can run at 44 or 22 watts. Finally, PCB but built to Bad Cat's usual uncompromising standards, the Cub III 15R (see p22 for review) has a switchable valve preamp running either an EF86 or a 12AX7 (around £1,149).





that's instantly familiar and very responsive. The Deluxe's volume controls are interactive because of the way the circuit is designed, so there's a wide range of tones to be had with different combinations, and you can jumper the inputs as well. The reworked volume control pot tapers also help to make the Deluxe more controllable at higher levels. This amp nails many classic lead sounds, which is hardly surprising as it was often used to record them. From Larry Carlton's epic *Kid Charlemagne* and *Don't Take Me Alive* solos on Steely Dan's *Royal Scam* album, to Billy Gibbons' trademark 'edge of the pick' harmonic squeals, this Deluxe reproduces legendary tones with great authority, and plenty of volume to handle small club gigs.

The Champ's single 6V6 output valve produces a massive overdriven sound, with pure Class A sweet harmonics and almost endless sustain when fully cranked. The truncated frequency response of the eight-inch Weber loudspeaker means the Champ can sound a little 'boxy' – it's all midrange and not a lot else – but this translates into a superb recording tone that needs little or

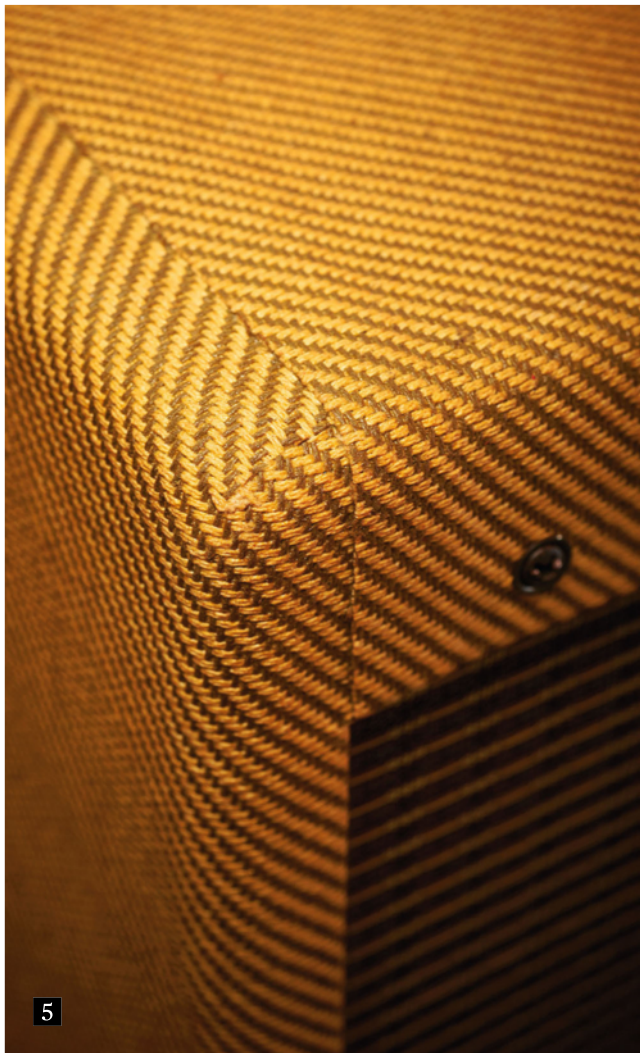
The Deluxe reproduces tones with great authority, and plenty of volume to handle small gigs

no EQ to punch through a mix. Add some reverb and you're into *Rocky Mountain Way* territory very quickly. The Champ sounds great with slide and if you want some greasy blues harp sounds, it's great for that, too, proving surprisingly versatile for an amp with just one control.

#### Verdict

It's taken a long time for these legendary amplifiers to reappear in Fender's catalogue. Together with the Custom '57 Pro and Twin, they're part of a quartet that promises unearthly tone for all who want to experience the thrill and fun of owning a real vintage amp, without the pitfalls and fragility of 60-year-old electronics.





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3. The Custom '57 Champ uses a special eight-inch Weber Alnico design that captures all the tone of the original and more besides. It's an ideal recording tool
4. Fender's Pure Vintage capacitors replicate the construction of the yellow Astron capacitors used in the late 1950s, for an even more authentic tone
5. Expertly applied fabric covering on both amps is what you'd expect from Fender's Custom Shop

And that's the key thing. Vintage amplifiers don't age gracefully. Capacitors dry out and short-circuit, the insulation on old transformer windings isn't resistant to overheating, while repeated hot/cold cycling can open up dry solder joints and overheated resistors can drift from their true value. And then there's the mains voltage – original tweeds are configured for USA power, and in stock configuration they're not properly earthed.

Now, hunting down and owning vintage amps is fun, but we'd never want to rely on one that's been around for six decades when on stage. So, if you're in the market for a vintage tweed combo, owning one that's every bit as good as the original but built to modern standards and set up for our mains voltage is really a no-brainer.

Still, that Custom Shop seal of excellence comes with a hefty price tag – and yet it's comparable to other top boutique equivalents, so the prices are relatively reasonable. We can't wait to see if Fender will do relic versions for the hardcore vintage enthusiast. Meanwhile, if you want great vintage USA tone, it doesn't get much better than this. **G**



### FENDER '57 CUSTOM TWEED CHAMP

**PRICE:** £939  
**ORIGIN:** USA  
**TYPE:** All valve, with valve rectifier  
**OUTPUT:** Approx. 5W RMS  
**VALVES:** 1x 12AY7, 1x 6V6, 1x 5Y3  
**DIMENSIONS:** 345mm (w) x 320mm (h) x 190mm (d)  
**WEIGHT (kg/lb):** 7/16  
**CABINET:** Finger-jointed solid pine  
**CHANNELS:** 1  
**CONTROLS:** Volume  
**FOOTSWITCH:** None  
**ADDITIONAL FEATURES:** Hi/Lo gain input jacks  
**RANGE OPTIONS:** The 57 Custom Tweed Deluxe costs £1,639, the Custom '57 Tweed Pro is £1,999, and the '57 Custom Tweed Twin is £2,419

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### FENDER '57 CUSTOM TWEED DELUXE

**PRICE:** £1,639  
**ORIGIN:** USA  
**TYPE:** All valve, with valve rectifier  
**OUTPUT:** Approx. 12W RMS  
**VALVES:** 1x 12AY7, 1x 12AX7, 2x 6V6, 1x 5Y3  
**DIMENSIONS:** 510mm (w) x 425mm (h) x 230mm (d)  
**WEIGHT (kg/lb):** 12/27  
**CABINET:** Finger-jointed solid pine  
**CHANNELS:** 2, non-switching  
**CONTROLS:** Instrument volume, microphone volume, tone  
**FOOTSWITCH:** None  
**ADDITIONAL FEATURES:** Dual Hi/Lo gain input jacks  
**RANGE OPTIONS:** See '57 Custom Tweed Champ



7/10

**PROS** Top-drawer tone; perfect amp for recording

**CONS** It's a one-trick pony, but a great trick; shamelessly expensive

9/10

**PROS** A wide range of tones from the deceptively simple controls; perfect volume level for small clubs and pubs

**CONS** Expensive