





Professional Standards

Fender's USA-made entry-level American Standard range gets a Professional makeover. A refresh too far or an essential upgrade? We find out...

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FENDER AMERICAN PROFESSIONAL SERIES £1,399 EACH

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Can it really be 31 years since the American Standard range relaunched the Fender ship and laid the foundation for today's über brand? Well, yes, but as of 2017, the American Standards are dead. Long live the all-new American Professional series.

There are nine guitars in the new guitar range: Strat, Tele, Strat HH, Strat HSS, Telecaster Deluxe, Jazzmaster and Jaguar, plus Strat and Tele lefties. But while the name is new, there's plenty here that's inherited from the Standard platform, such as the flattened 241mm (9.5-inch) fingerboard radius and the two-post vibratos. The Professionals – just like the Standards before them – are designed to appeal to a wide range of players with a wide range of styles. These are not for vintage obsessives. Most of the changes are relatively subtle: a new 'modern deep C' neck shape; new narrow/tall frets; and the Teles revert back to three (compensated) brass saddles over the previous six Strat-style saddles. And, oh yes, we've got new colours, too: Sonic Grey, Antique Olive and Mystic Seafoam join the ranks.

Stratocaster

The major difference, however, is the new single-coil pickups. Now, we've already covered Tim Shaw's Shawbucker-equipped American Standards and, as you can see, we have a duo of those on review here. But it's the single coils that Tim has concentrated on for this collection. The basic premise lies in using different rod magnets for the treble and bass sides of the pickups from a choice of Alnico 2, 3 and 5, as Tim explains on p96. All the Strat pickups use 42 gauge Formvar wire and are calibrated for their positions,

plus the centre pickup is RWRP so the parallel mixes are hum-cancelling.

Another change we see for this year is a slightly tweaked control circuit, in that the volume uses a treble bleed capacitor and resistor (an RC network) on the volume control to retain the high-end as you turn your volume down.

Telecaster

Both single coils here use Alnico 5 rods on the bass side and Alnico 2 on the trebles and, like the Strat, we have that treble bleed RC network on the volume. There are no other wiring tricks.

As we mentioned, though, the return to three brass saddles is much more 'traditional Telecaster': these are nicely compensated and offer slightly wider string spacing than the Strat's bridge and, on closer inspection, it's actually part of a completely new bridge design. The half-walled bridge plate subtly aids palm muting, plus the partial 'ashtray' cover push-fits over the intonation screws and is both comfortable as a palm rest and adds an unusual yet nicely retro appearance. Of course, like the original cover, you don't have to use it. Also, the bridge plate is screwed down at its top edges – a trick many a player has added to help prevent microphonic feedback. As a result, the bridge plate is a little longer and wider: 88.7mm long by 82mm wide.

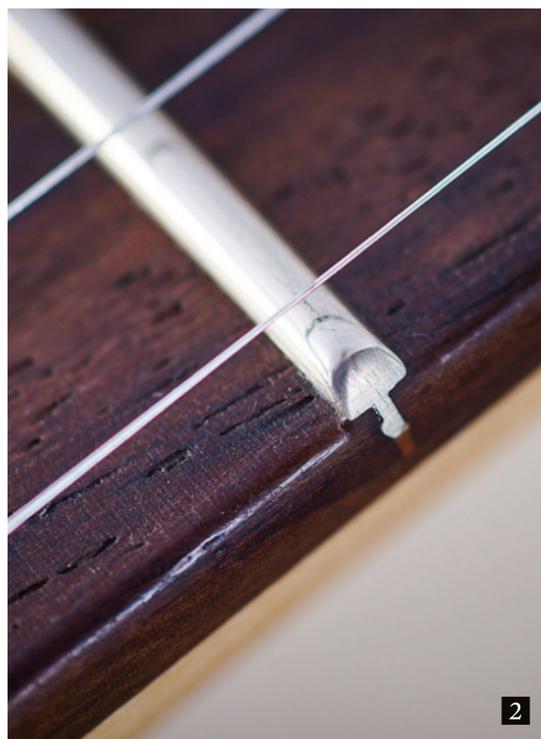
As ever, the options of body wood – ash or alder – are colour dependent, as are the rosewood or maple fingerboard options (see spec lists on p95). Our new and rather showy light metallic Mystic Seafoam (only available with a maple fingerboard and alder body) won't be to everyone's taste.

Here's a modern, clean-voiced Stratocaster that almost sounds like it's been 'produced' to maximise its Strat-i-ness

Stratocaster HSS Shawbucker

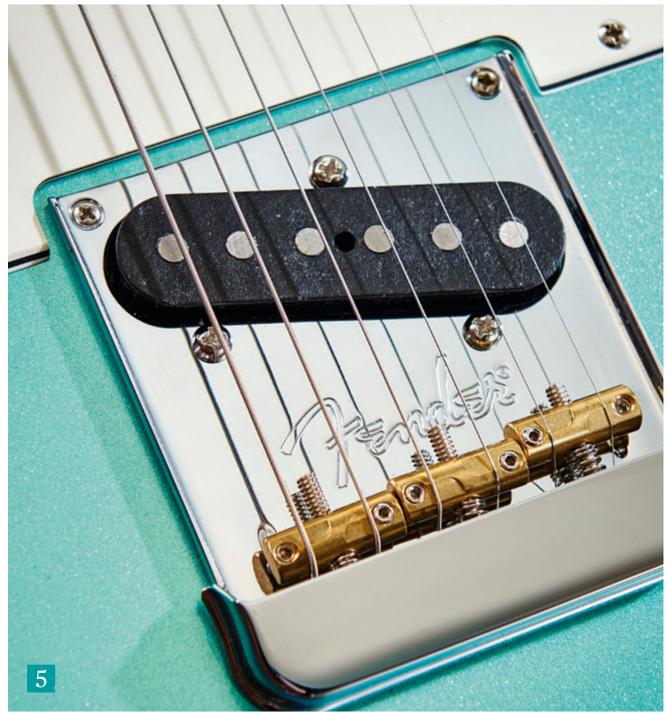
The definition of the original modded Strat, the HSS takes the Pro Strat platform and adds a Shawbucker 1 at the bridge. It's a pretty classic vintage-spec, low-output humbucker using an Alnico 2 bar magnet, 42 gauge plain enamel wire and unpotted coils "to capture every nuance of your style", says Fender.

Like the previous American Standard HSS Shawbucker, the Pro version is wired – in position 2 (bridge and middle) on the five-way selector switch – "so that the humbucker is full on; it doesn't drop one coil", explains Tim Shaw. "So that position is a bit thicker-sounding than it could be with only two coils working, but it's the way the HSS American Standard Strats have always been wired. It also has a stacked 500k/250kohm volume pot, so the



1. One of many upgrades to the American Professional series is the inclusion of bone nuts on all models
2. Another change is the narrow/tall fretwire, slightly narrower but a little taller than Dunlop's 6105 spec
3. A major upgrade is the single-coil pickups that blend different Alnico magnets on the treble and bass sides





4. Like the American Standards, the new Pros have standard control setups – no S-1 switching here!

5. The Pro Tele reverts to three (compensated) brass saddles in a new bridge design pictured with its removable, partial cover in place: you choose!

6. Again, the Tele's pickups use the blended magnet concept: both use Alnico 5 on the bass strings and Alnico 2 for the treble strings





All the planets seem to align... to create what seems like a modern Tele in spec but one that has plenty of classic, vintage reference

Shawbucker sees the 500k circuit [positions 2 and 1], and the single coils see the 250k circuit. That's the optimum control load, as far as I'm concerned: using the 500K pot on position 2 opens up the sound of both pickups together.

"There's [also] a different RC circuit for the humbucker side and the single-coil side," he adds, "so we've tailored the bleed for the different pickups it sees."

Stratocaster HH Shawbucker

This third Strat uses a pair of Tim's humbuckers, the difference being that the lower output Shawbucker 1 is placed at the neck and an 'overwound' Shawbucker 2 is added at the bridge.

"The 2 is a little bit hotter, but still at the lower end of the spectrum – about 8kohm verses 7.6k – for a bit more oomph at the bridge," Tim explains. "Everything else is the same. It all works musically; it's cleaner and more subtle compared with the previous American Standard HH version. If

it loses the twang, then I think it becomes a one-trick pony."

There's a 500k volume control (with the treble bleed circuit), but the guitar still retains a five-position lever selector switch that offers – aside from the standard bridge, both and neck – the inside coils of both 'buckers in position 2, and the outer screw coils of both pickups in position 4.

Sounds

The new neck shape here – on the Strats, at least – isn't hugely different from the ubiquitous modern 'C' of the previous Standards; it's marginally deeper back-to-front with a subtly fuller shoulder. That said, our three Strats are all slightly different, and more so the bigger-feeling Telecaster. But it's not just about the feel, as Tim explains: "Beefing up the neck as it goes into the body – taking it back to the way they had been – stiffens the neck and basically gives us a little more sustain and allows the high strings to ring a little better."

All the Professional models are shipped with 0.009s, again reflecting their mainstream target along with a pretty low and slinky action. The new wire measures 2.35mm wide and approximately 1.3mm high, which seems slightly narrower but a little taller than Dunlop's 6105 spec – making bends, hammer-ons and pull-offs really easy. Another subtle plus-point.

To some more vintage-y players, there might be a lack of character to be found here. To most of us, however, the Pros feel like very fit-for-purpose tools – get on and play. It's the same deal with the vibrato. Yes, the string spacing is slightly narrower-than-vintage, but it's extremely smooth with approximately a tone upbend on the high E, a minor 3rd on the G, and more than enough down-bend for most. The new arm just pushes in (there's a small screw at the back of the block to set the swing tension), and straight out of the box it offers pretty spot-on tuning stability.

Colours & Woods

The new Pro range introduces three new colours – Sonic Grey, Antique Olive and Mystic Seafoam – but your choice of body type (ash or alder) is limited; less so, the fingerboard material (maple or rosewood). The Strat with ash body is only available in Sienna Sunburst; likewise the HSS – both have either maple or rosewood 'boards. It's alder-only on the HH, while the Tele, as you'd expect, has an ash body on Natural, Crimson Red (rosewood) and Natural 2-Colour Sunburst, Butterscotch Blonde and Mystic Seafoam (maple).

The alder choices are wider on the Strats with 3-Colour Sunburst, Olympic White, Black, Sonic Gray and Antique Olive (all with either maple or rosewood 'boards). The alder HSS comes in 3-Colour Sunburst, Black, Sonic Gray and Antique Olive (rosewood), with a maple-'board Olympic White replacing Sonic Gray. The HH is only offered with rosewood fingerboard in 3-Colour Sunburst, Olympic White, Black, Sonic Gray and Antique Olive.

Alder-bodied Teles are available in 3-Colour Sunburst, 2-Colour Sunburst, Black, Natural, Butterscotch Blonde, Mystic Seafoam (maple); 3-Colour Sunburst, Olympic White, Natural, Crimson Red Trans and Sonic Gray (rosewood).

All the American Pro Series guitars have a gloss polyurethane body with satin urethane on the neck back and gloss urethane on the headstock face.



The HSS has a less pushy character than the SSS... it sounds a little more 'blurred', in a good way – very Fender

Plugging in a couple of reference Strats before the new Pro Strat, the latter sounds immediately brighter and spankier, cleaner than the rougher, tougher voice of our Custom Shop Texas Special-equipped original '60s Road Worn. Slightly raising the pickups and reducing the bass-side tilt a little does warm things up, but here's a modern, clean-voiced Strat that almost sounds like it's been 'produced' to maximise its Strat-i-ness. Where are you going to take it? We find ourselves driving in a slightly different way, pulling back the tones a little to lose some of that edge for rougher tones, while the treble bleed cap keeps things bright as we knock back the volume and hit the pop/funk button.

As we move through the three Strats, there's a different character that emerges and it's not just the additional humbuckers. The HSS, for example, has a less pushy character than the SSS, which sounds a little

beefier in the lower mids with a little more separation, clarity and percussion. The HSS sounds a little more 'blurred', in a good way – very Fender. The maple neck, too, while marginally deeper, feels as if it has a squarer shoulder (much like the maple-'board Tele) as well as a bigger radius to the rolled edges. The bridge/middle mix is a little muted, less stringy – again, in a good way – while the nicely balanced bridge humbucker smooths some of the spikier highs and nails a more classic rock voice into a crunchier gained Marshall-like amp channel.

Plugging the HH into the same amp ups the rock factor with a little more kick from the bridge and a hugely characterful PAF/bolt-on voice. Drop back to a cleaner Fender-style amp, though, and there's a smoother steel-y voice that, combined with the very usable coil-split combinations, makes for a very versatile platform: it might be less Strat-specific, but it moves from

FENDER AMERICAN PRO SERIES
dimensions
(in mm unless stated)



	STRAT	TELE	STRAT HSS	STRAT HH
Nut width	42.72	43.4	42.83	42.43
Neck depth 1st fret	20.8	21.5	21.1	21.1
Neck depth 12th fret	23.2	23.5	23.4	23.4
Weight (kg/lb)	3.5/7.7	3.56/7.8	3.68/8.1	3.6/8
Bridge pickup DC res (k ohm)	6.33	7.04	6.97	7.55
Middle pickup DC res (k ohm)	6.28	n/a	6.12	n/a
Neck pickup DC res (k ohm)	6.04	5.98	6.04	6.93



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7. Like the previous American Standard, the HSS model uses a dual stacked 500/250kohm volume pot so the single coils 'see' the 250k pot; the humbucker sees the 500k pot. All the Pros have a treble bleed RC circuit on the volume control

8. The HSS uses a classic PAF-like Shawbucker 1 at the bridge with unpotted coils

9. The enclosed tuners are the same as the American Standards, except they all have the short posts for maximum break angle behind the nut

10. Simple but hugely effective, the new vibratos have a pop-in arm with a small Allen key for swing tension adjustment

11. The Pros retain the long-standing micro-tilt adjustment, which makes shimming a neck a thing of the past – great for quick setups



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11



Some players will consider a dual-humbucking Strat a 'crime' – akin to adding a Floyd Rose to a Les Paul – but not this writer

steel-like jazzy and swingy blues, through crunchy classic rock gains, easily into hair metal or Foo Fighters-like gained drive.

Some players will consider a dual-humbucking Strat a 'crime' – akin to adding a Floyd Rose to a Les Paul – but this writer isn't one of them. It retains that percussive, brighter Fender voicing, but the dual humbuckers lose the potentially visceral cut of the single coils, while the relatively low-output voicing of the 'buckers proves highly versatile. If you're a Gibson player, you have some tonal reference (even though you only have one volume control), yet this bolt-on

platform adds cut, or indeed clarity. The two 'extra' sounds over a usual three-way neck, both and bridge setup drop in very usable contrast, although they do sound a little thin compared with, for example, the partial coil-splits used by PRS on its similar concept dual-humbucker bolt-on CE 24.

If our three Strats have surprisingly different characters, then the lone Tele adds a fourth. We get that very slightly fuller feel to the neck and a basic trio of sounds that shouts 'contemporary Tele' from the biting harmonically rich honk of the flat-pole bridge, through the wider, less quacky pickup mix, to the less hard-hitting but not soft neck voice. Like the Strat, it's like someone has EQ'd the sound to balance and maximise its Tele-ness. There's a very lively ringing resonance, too: all the planets seem to align, the maple neck/alder body perhaps pulling down a little edgy spike, while those brass saddles – not to mention the through-body stringing and the more classically voiced pickups – combine to create what seems like a modern Tele in spec but one that has plenty of classic, vintage reference.

Verdict

The first question is, are the Pros simply a rebranded Standard or an upgrade? For the everyman player, it's the latter. The colour/wood choices are wide and the subtle improvements to the build – on an already very well proven chassis – make a noticeable change, not least the new neck shape and the taller fretwire. Sonically, too, these Pros draw on plenty of classic character, especially the Shawbucker 2 at the bridge – take the HH and compare it with the previous Standard, and you'll find a contrast in its clear and balanced new single coils. Yes, we've played thicker, beefier-sounding Strats and Teles, and thinner, brighter ones, too, but as a foundation tone – which also includes a very smart and practical, lightweight moulded case – it all becomes a bit of a no-brainer. **G**



12. The Strat HH places a Shawbucker 1 in neck position and a slightly overwound Shawbucker 2 at the bridge

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FENDER AMERICAN PROFESSIONAL STRATOCASTER

PRICE: £1,399 (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
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood, 'clay' dot markers, 241mm (9.5") radius
FRETS: 22, narrow tall
HARDWARE: Nickel/chromed-plated 2-point Synchronized vibrato with bent steel saddles and pop-in arm, Fender Standard cast/sealed staggered tuners
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 52.5mm
ELECTRICS: 3x Fender V-Mod single-coil Strat pickups, 5-position lever pickup selector switch, master volume (w/ treble bleed), tone 1 (neck), tone 2 (middle & bridge) with aged white plastic knobs
OPTIONS: Maple fingerboard (see 'Colours & Woods', p91)
RANGE OPTIONS: See other Strats on review
LEFT-HANDERS: Yes, at £1,469 with maple or rosewood 'boards in 3-Colour Sunburst, Olympic White and Black
FINISHES: Antique Olive (as reviewed); see 'Colours & Woods', p91

Guitarist CHOICE 9/10

PROS Upgrades from American Standard spec; new pickups and pop-in vibrato arm: superb workhorse contemporary Strat

CONS Its middle-of-the-road spec may be a little bland for some



FENDER AMERICAN PROFESSIONAL TELECASTER

PRICE: £1,399 (inc case)
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: Single-cutaway solidbody electric
BODY: Alder
NECK: Maple, modern 'deep C' profile, bolt-on
SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")
NUT: Bone
FINGERBOARD: Maple, black dot markers, 241mm (9.5") radius
FRETS: 22, narrow tall
HARDWARE: Nickel/chromed-plated strings-through-body Tele bridge with 3 compensated brass saddles, 6-screw mounting with removable modern ashtray bridge cover, Fender Standard cast/sealed staggered tuners
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 54mm
ELECTRICS: 2x Fender V-Mod single-coil Tele pickups, 3-position lever pickup selector switch, master volume (with treble bleed) and master tone with knurled flat-top knobs
OPTIONS: Rosewood fingerboard (see 'Colours & Woods', p91)
RANGE OPTIONS: The Pro Deluxe Shawbucker (£1,469) with Shawbucker 1T at neck and 2T at bridge
LEFT-HANDERS: Yes, at £1,469
FINISHES: Mystic Seafoam (as reviewed); see 'Colours & Woods', p91

Guitarist CHOICE 9/10

PROS Upgrades from American Standard spec; new bridge and pickups; a great workhorse contemporary Telecaster

CONS Its middle-of-the-road spec may be a little bland for some



FENDER AMERICAN PROFESSIONAL STRATOCASTER HSS SHAWBUCKER

PRICE: £1,399 (inc case)
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: Offset double-cutaway solidbody electric
BODY: Ash
NECK: Maple, modern 'deep C' profile, bolt-on
SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")
NUT: Bone
FINGERBOARD: Maple, black dot markers, 241mm (9.5") radius
FRETS: 22, narrow tall
HARDWARE: Nickel/chromed-plated 2-point Synchronized vibrato with bent steel saddles and pop-in arm, Fender Standard cast/sealed staggered tuners
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 52.5mm
ELECTRICS: Fender Shawbucker 1 (bridge), V-Mod single-coil Strat (middle & neck), 5-position lever pickup selector switch, master volume (w/ treble bleed), tone 1 (neck & middle), tone 2 (bridge) with aged white plastic knobs
OPTIONS: Rosewood fingerboard (see 'Colours & Woods', p91)
RANGE OPTIONS: See other Strats on review
LEFT-HANDERS: Not this model
FINISHES: Sienna Sunburst (as reviewed); see 'Colours & Woods', p91

Guitarist CHOICE 9/10

PROS Upgrades from American Standard spec; new pop-in vibrato arm and pickups: workhorse Stratocaster with subtle kick

CONS Some players just don't get humbuckers on Strats!



FENDER AMERICAN PROFESSIONAL STRATOCASTER HH SHAWBUCKER

PRICE: £1,399 (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
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood, 'clay' dot markers, 241mm (9.5") radius
FRETS: 22, narrow tall
HARDWARE: Nickel/chromed-plated 2-point Synchronized vibrato with bent steel saddles and pop-in arm, Fender Standard cast/sealed staggered tuners
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 54mm
ELECTRICS: Fender Shawbucker 2 (bridge), Shawbucker 1 (neck), 5-position lever pickup selector switch, master volume (w/ treble bleed), tone 1 (neck), tone 2 (bridge) with aged white plastic knobs
OPTIONS: None
RANGE OPTIONS: See other Strats on review
LEFT-HANDERS: Not this model
FINISHES: Black (as reviewed); see 'Colours & Woods', p91

Guitarist CHOICE 9/10

PROS Upgrades from American Standard spec; new pop-in vibrato arm and pickups; it's like a Gibbo in Fender clothing

CONS Dual 'buckers on a Strat should be so wrong, not in this guise, though