

SQUIER CLASSIC VIBE STRATOCASTER '50S, STRATOCASTER '60S & TELECASTER '50S ALL £279
ELECTRICS



PHOTOGRAPHY BY NEIL GODWIN



Squier Classic Vibe Strat '50s, Strat '60s & Tele '50s

all £279

A brand new range of guitars that attempts to recreate the very best bits of Fenders from the fifties and sixties. There's also a quick stop in Japan circa 1982... *by Simon Bradley*

us. "Specification-wise these instruments are not intended to be vintage correct but rather to impart the vibe of a classic Fender design and that distinctive Fender look. All feature modern specifications similar to our [Squier] Standard Series."

The Rivals

Classic Vibe Strats

Fender's **Classic Player** range of '50s & '60s Strats (£499) are among the nicest Strats we've ever played. Overseen by the mighty Dennis Galuszka and built in Mexico, everyone should try one of these. Alternatively try **Blade's** toneful and versatile **Texas Standard Pro** (£499). The **Vintage V6 Icon** (£249) is basically just a copy but it certainly looks the part.

What we want to know

- 1 What's vibe anyway?**
In this case, vibe is that unfathomable history and feel of a vintage instrument. These guitars aren't formal vintage reissues as such, but have been designed to recreate the look and lust-factor of classic fifties and sixties Fenders as well as that of Squiers from the early eighties.
- 2 How close are these to the original specs?**
We'll be addressing that and we'll also point out slight differences too, such as they are: some are cosmetic, others electrical but all are valid and add to the whole package.
- 3 Who are they for?**
The obvious answer would seem to be 'beginners' or 'players on a budget', but once they find themselves in the hands of more accomplished players the appeal of these guitars will skyrocket. They're ideal for a spot of pimping up too.

Fender Japan is now a cornerstone of the increasingly humungous Fender MIC and, since its inception in 1982, has produced many great instruments to the exacting spec afforded by 60 years of glittering history.

The first guitars to be released from the Fuji Gen Gakki factory in Matsumoto didn't actually bear the Fender logo as such (well, aside from microscopically under the main brand name). The guitars were, in fact, the very first examples of the Squier JV – or Japanese Vintage – series, which hit the British streets in July 1982 and landed in the rest of Europe shortly afterwards. Thanks to the excellent quality and use of American pickups in the Strats, they proved popular very quickly. A cursory scout around Ebay will show that they're more sought-after than ever these days, and this reviewer includes an original 1982 JV Strat on his list of 'guitars I never should have sold'.

Fast-forward to 2008 and this latest range of Far Eastern (Chinese in this case) Squiers: the Classic Vibe series. On first glance you might assume that these three examples are intended to be the first foray into a selection of Squier-branded vintage reissues,

but the idea is rather focused more on the intention to hark back to those halcyon early eighties days of the JV and recapture that vibe.

"The idea behind Classic Vibe was to offer value brand alternative products that really brought us back to the beginnings or origins of very first Squier solidbody electrics," Chris Gill, Squier's marketing manager, told



For classic Fender tone the Stratocaster '50s has three Alnico III single-coil pickups



More Good Vibrations

Four-stringers can also benefit from this new series

A trio of Classic Vibe basses are available, all retailing at £309 and including a beautiful Lake Placid blue '50s style P-bass that boasts a 'custom original' single-coil, a Sonic blue sixties-style Precision with a reversed thumb rest, and an Olympic white sixties-style Jazz with a tortoiseshell scratchplate.

There's one more combatant, and a guitar we'll be reviewing next issue: the Duo-Sonic '50s. Available in the unusual desert sand maple finish that looks very cool next to the clear gloss maple neck, it also includes an anodised aluminium-alike scratchplate and a pair of Alnico V single-coils. Listen out for soundbites on next issue's CD.

Classic Vibe Stratocaster '50s

At the time of writing, Squier is offering just the finishes of the three specific guitars we have here. In this case the mix of black and honey-brown on this two-tone sunburst really has been superbly applied, especially considering the price point. This is assisted no end by the subtle yet eye-catching grain of the alder bodies used on both Strats here.

"The Stratocaster guitars are solid alder spreads," confirms Gill. "The basses are basswood along with the Duo-Sonic, while the Telecaster is made of pine, which has proven to be perfect to replicate the look of a fifties blonde-over-ash design."

If we were to be very critical, we'd be obliged to point out the

overly hefty scratchplate – almost twice as thick as that of a 1989 Japanese Fender Strat we're using as a comparison – but it is affixed with eight, historically requisite, screws. A five-way switch controls three vintage-style and aged-covered single-coils alongside a single volume and two tone pots in the familiar way. The pickups here, and on the Tele, include Alnico III magnets, while the coils of the '60s Strat are loaded with Alnico V.

"The pickups, of course, deliver classic Fender tones," Gill tells us. "Sound-wise, again, we wanted to feature the best of classic Fender. Our partner in manufacturing makes high quality pickups so we had the benefit of being able to work directly with them rather than rely on an outside source or

an off-the-shelf pickup."

Of course, retrofitting higher-grade pickups would simply be a case of spending a few minutes with a soldering iron and screwdriver, but changing out the bridge might prove a tad more complex because this vintage-style vibrato is the more tightly string-spaced version – smaller than that used on American vintage-style Fenders, so the body mounting holes differ. That said, both Strats are nicely set-up out of the box, and these bridges feel of good quality, so who really needs to upgrade?

Our last major Guitarist Squier review took place in issue 262, where we were knocked out by the superb quality of the necks of the '51, Tele Custom and Custom II in particular. If anything, all three necks here have upped the ante still further and, aside from the standard difference in Strat and Tele headstock design, each feels and plays virtually identically. What's more, all also include a synthetic bone nut and vintage-style Kluson-alike slot-head tuners. They work perfectly well.

All necks are constructed from a single piece of high-quality maple – the '50s Strat neck even glimmers with a shimmer of figure. The shaping behind the headstocks wouldn't be out of place on a full-blown American instrument and the 21 medium frets make each guitar ridiculously easy to play.

It seems that the guitarist within Chris Gill is equally enamoured. "The necks are wonderful," he agrees. "A typical amount of machine work is involved in the general manufacturing as you would suspect, while final hand-sanding finishes it off to give them that great feel and shape behind the headstock of which you speak.

All necks are constructed from a single piece of maple – the '50s Strat neck even glimmers with a shimmer of figure



The Squier logo sits proudly above the smaller parent company logo for Fender



“This is often the hardest thing to communicate to a manufacturing partner so we are proud of this in particular. Again, all feature modern dimensions and the stained gloss adds a nice touch and harks back to those Japanese import models from the early eighties. On a couple of instruments the clear gloss looked better so we went with that on the '50s Precision and Duo-Sonic.”

All up, from an initial look and a little while playing, this guitar could cost a lot more money.

Classic Vibe Stratocaster '60s

With a ruddy, three-tone sunburst finish and tortoiseshell scratchplate, the '60s Strat is slightly further from the norm. “To be honest that look was inspired by a guitar that I saw a picture of in a vintage book,” laughs Gill.

Again, praise should be heaped upon the quality of the wood used: the rosewood fingerboard is dark and attractively grained and it also bears plastic dots that, from a distance, could be mistaken for ‘clay’ originals. It all adds, again, to the overall vibe.

Aside from the trio of Alnico V pickups, the spec and feel is the same as that of the '50s Strat. Well, apart from the black rather than white trem cavity plate...

Classic Vibe Telecaster '50s

The Tele's pine body is certainly a more than decent aesthetic substitute for ash as, beneath the off-white Vintage Blonde finish, there's just enough of that characteristic streaky grain on show. One assumes that the appearance isn't quite so convincing under the arguably more authentic butterscotch finish but, once again, it is vibe

rather than unbending accuracy that's the goal here.

Pickups comprise a standard Alnico III Telecaster set selected by a barrel-tipped three-way lever switch, and the nickel-plated hardware is laid out in the standard formation.

The vintage bridge includes three brass barrel saddles to facilitate thru-body stringing. Although in no way as stout as those fitted to a US '52 Reissue, they do their job admirably and, should you desire, are easily changed out for replacements.

Sounds

You'd expect, if everything else is the same, single-coils based around Alnico III magnets would possess a warmer, more subdued tone than those with Alnico V and, when comparing the '50s Strat with the '60s, the zing and trebly bite of the latter is apparent.

Positions two and four are more crystalline and brittle – in a good way – and, with additional gain, the bridge and neck coils do sing in the traditional manner. In this scenario, Alnico IIIs do tend to drive at lower gains, and they give the '50s Tele a fuller tone that also benefits from a slightly improved level of warmth. In other words, it gives a markedly more vintage-sounding performance.

On the other hand the '60s Strat gives a stronger pick attack, which is more suited to higher-gain settings and aggressive solo work.

The Telecaster too provides no surprises and sounds exactly as you'd expect: plenty of clean zest, high-end brang and higher gain body. No-one's pretending that pine is as desirable a tonewood as the more traditional ash but the Classic Vibe acts exactly how any Tele should reasonably be expected to, certainly at this price, with no hint of fuss or struggle.

As we've pointed out, all three instruments possess in effect the same neck profile and are therefore very similar in their feel and playability, which, again at this price, is more than impressive. The Strats' vibratos wobble nicely and, with the usual precautions, stay in tune as acceptably as they ever have; the hard-tail Tele, of course, stands up to all manner of double-stop and behind the nut bending techniques – just as it should.

Verdict

Although Squier's Standard Series (from £209) represents good value, we must now suggest that the Classic Vibe range has become the initial port of call if you're after your first Strat, Tele, P or

The Rivals

Classic Vibe Tele

The **Fender Classic Series '50s Telecaster** (£499) is the entry point to Fender's vintage-style Teles. An ash body, vintage-type hardware and Alnico single-coils do the biz. **Encore's Blaster E2** (£109) offers a modicum of T-style magic for a small amount of outlay, although the quality isn't really up to that of the Squier. For something a little different, the **Peavey Generation EX** (£119) offers a trio of vintage wound single-coils alongside a decent neck and cool look.



The Telecaster '50s is supplied with two vintage-style Alnico III Telecaster single-coils



Jazz bass, or even a Duo-Sonic.
The three here are very similar in spec and performance, albeit with a couple of important differences, so it's difficult to set them apart score-wise. However, if we had a metaphorical Glock 17 pressed to our heads and were told to pick just one, we'd be walking off with the '50s Strat. It looks the part, plays wonderfully and sounds authentic too. That said, we'd miss the '60s Strat and '50s Tele like a pair of gorgeous twins with dubious morals...

Of course, each guitar is ripe for upgrading and their construction is more than robust enough to allow for both hardware and pickup upgrades. The truth is, however, that even accomplished players may not need to carry out such tasks – the overall quality of the existing fittings is well up to par. There really is no excuse whatsoever for not owning a Fender-style electric with added mojo and vibe. 🎸

The Bottom Line

Squier Classic Vibe Stratocaster '50s

We like: Great looks; superb neck (we even get some figure); cool vintage-flavoured tones

We dislike: The scratchplate is too thick

Guitarist says: If you can't stretch to the Fender Classic Series '50s Stratocaster, this is definitely the guitar to buy.

Squier Classic Vibe Stratocaster '60s

We like: More individual looks; great neck; more bite, tonally

We dislike: Some might feel the over-red scratchplate is a little subtle

Guitarist says: Classic looks, easy playability and good tone should bring many more players to the Squier party

Squier Classic Vibe Telecaster '50s

We like: Smooth tone; use of pine to 'simulate' ash

We dislike: The neck. As good as it is, it lacks some old-school Tele character

Guitarist says: Every Guitarist reader should own a Tele. If you're on a budget but still want a quality version, this is it



Squier Classic Vibe Stratocaster '50s

PRICE: £279.99
ORIGIN: China
TYPE: Double-cutaway, solidbody electric
BODY: Alder
NECK: Maple, bolt-on
SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5-inch)
NUT/WIDTH: Synthetic bone/42mm
FINGERBOARD: Maple, 241mm radius, black dot inlays
FRETS: 21, medium jumbo
HARDWARE: Vintage-style 'Synchronised' vibrato, vintage-style slot-head tuners
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 53mm
ELECTRICS: Three vintage-style Alnico III single-coils, five-way lever pickup selector, volume, two tones
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 2.94/6.5
RANGE OPTIONS: The student-sized Duo-Sonic also goes for £279, with the '50s & '60s Precision, and Jazz basses all retailing at £309
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISHES: Two-colour sunburst only
Fender GBI 01342 331700
www.squierguitars.com

Test results

Build quality	★★★★★
Playability	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★



Squier Classic Vibe Stratocaster '60s

PRICE: £279.99
ORIGIN: China
TYPE: Double-cutaway, solidbody electric
BODY: Alder
NECK: Maple, bolt-on
SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5-inch)
NUT/WIDTH: Synthetic bone/42mm
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood, 241mm radius, black dot inlays
FRETS: 21, medium jumbo
HARDWARE: Vintage-style 'Synchronised' vibrato, vintage-style slot-head tuners
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 53mm
ELECTRICS: Three vintage-style Alnico V single-coils, five-way lever pickup selector, volume, two tones
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 2.94/6.5
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISHES: Three-colour sunburst only

Test results

Build quality	★★★★★
Playability	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★



Squier Classic Vibe Telecaster '50s

PRICE: £279.99
ORIGIN: China
TYPE: Single-cutaway, solidbody electric
BODY: Pine
NECK: Maple, bolt-on
SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5-inch)
NUT/WIDTH: Synthetic bone/42mm
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood, 241mm radius, white dot inlays
FRETS: 21, medium jumbo
HARDWARE: Vintage-style three-saddle bridge, vintage-style slot-head tuners
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 54mm
ELECTRICS: Two vintage-style Alnico III Telecaster single-coils, three-way lever pickup selector, master volume and tone
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.17/7
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISHES: Vintage blonde only

Test results

Build quality	★★★★★
Playability	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★