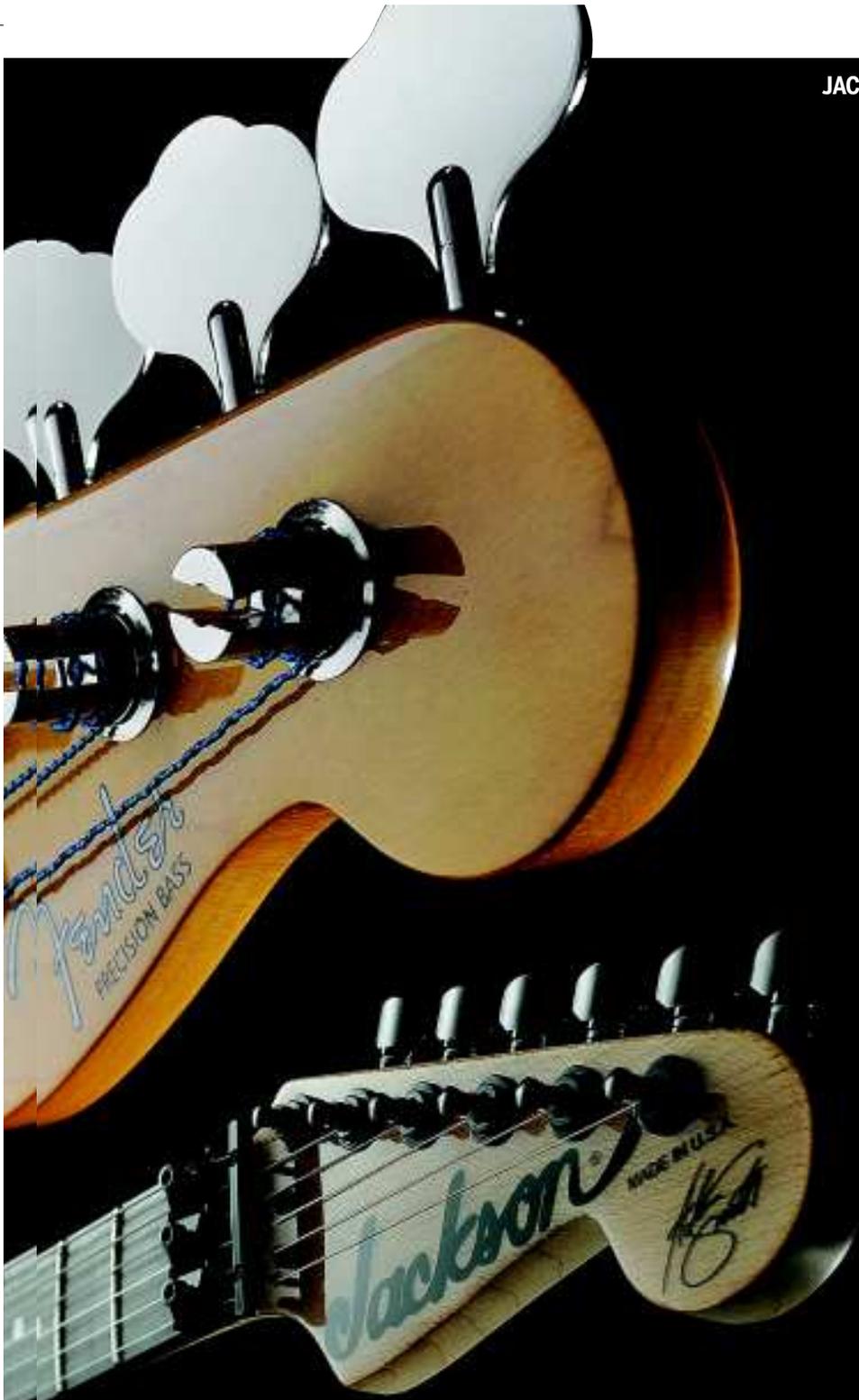


JACKSON/FENDER IRON MAIDEN SIGNATURES £1,139-£1,799
ELECTRICS/BASS

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOBY SESSIONS

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IRON MIGHTY

A trio of new high-end Iron Maiden signature guitars that really go back somewhere in time... **by Simon Bradley & Roger Newell**



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Jackson/Fender Iron Maiden signatures

£1,139-£1,799

What we want to know

1 How do they differ from the previous models?

The 2001 Japanese Fender Iron Maiden Strat bore little resemblance to models played by the band, with a mirrored pickguard and Seymour Duncan pickups. But the P-bass was much closer to Harris' original.

2 Did the band members have any input?

These aren't tribute models, so don't expect exact recreations, but Adrian Smith did give us some insight into his Jackson. Murray's Strat featured on Maiden's first five albums, so it's an iconic instrument. One question we're not going to ask is where the Janick Gers model is...

3 Are they only designed for rock and metal use?

Since when have Strats and P-Basses been only for rock and metal? The guitars' hot pickups work well in those styles but there's plenty more on offer besides.

We've been itching to get our hands on these babies for many months now and the timing couldn't be better: we're writing this review on official Iron Maiden Day!

As a band, Maiden were honoured with a Fender Strat back in 2001 (reviewed in issue 213) but these new axes mark the first occasion that any specific member of the six-string fusillade has been given a signature model.

Although a Dave Murray Strat has been sporadically available via Fender Japan for a while now (the HST-57DM), this new US-built model – based on Murray's original guitar that, in turn, was previously owned by Paul Kossoff – is on sale across the globe. Also issued by Fender is a new version of the Iron Maiden P-bass, which now bears the squiggle of four-string main man Steve Harris. Meanwhile Jackson – now part of the Fender family, of course – has also released an Adrian Smith Signature Dinky.

In effect, all three guitars hark back to the instruments used by the respective members on 1987's *Somewhere In Time* tour and, although none of them are intended as a strict replica model, the spec, look and, most importantly, vibe and tone is designed to be close to

the guitars on which some great rock music was played.

Jackson Adrian Smith San Dimas DK

We managed to grab a couple of minutes with Adrian on the eve of the final date of the band's recent tour to ask him what sort of input he had with this new Jackson model?

"When I heard they were going to build one, I said okay but send me one to try out. They did that and I really liked it straight away: this was the ebony fingerboard model. Later I tried the maple neck model,

but the neck was too fat, so they modified that to my liking."

And how did the original model come into being? "Grover Jackson came to a lot of the shows with different prototype guitars for me to try. I had a fifties Fender Strat that I liked, so he took measurements from that and it formed the basis for the [signature] model."

The example we have here is slightly different from Smith's original, but only in that it features an ebony, rather than maple, fingerboard and a white instead of black pickguard – the remainder of the spec and feel is the same as its virtual opposite.

One important difference in spec concerns the pickups. The configuration of Smith's original was h/s/h, while the 2009 model comes loaded with two Fender Samarium-Cobalt-Noiseless (SCN) single-coils to work with a now-classic DiMarzio Super Distortion in the bridge.

The Jackson's maple and ebony neck – with 22 huge frets and a conical radius – is a rock player's dream



The Floyd Rose is just what Adrian needs for those famous dive-bombs



“I’m always experimenting tonally,” continues Smith. “For example, with different tunings, guitar synths and various guitars. Lately I’ve been trying out the classic Fender neck pickup sound. That really sounds different to what the other guitarists [in the band] are doing.”

An original Floyd Rose is the obvious choice of bridge, as Smith is adept at incorporating subtle vibrato as well as precise dive-bombs into his playing, while the maple and ebony neck – with 22 huge frets and a conical radius – is a rock-player’s dream.

Sounds

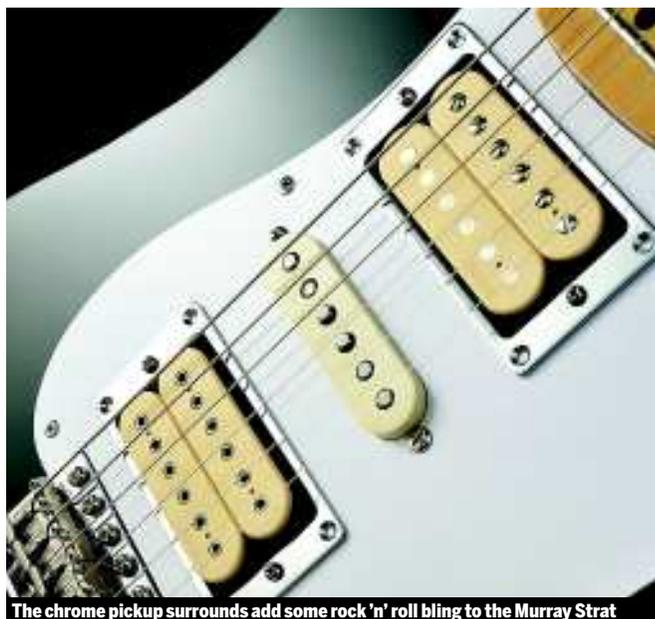
The guitar’s main voice, perhaps unsurprisingly, is a full-on rock tone and, using a Marshall JVM401C combo, the tone is full, distinct and dark. It’s more difficult than usual to describe here, but imagine an imposing wall of sound that

nevertheless comprises six distinct strings and you’re most of the way there to getting just how huge the guitar’s rock tone is.

The combination of both coils of the hot bridge humbucker with a single-coil, as selected by the second position of the five-way here, is always an inspirational one as you get the best of both worlds – a cool level of fat, middly beef that’s encircled by some Fullerton-flavoured sparkle.

It’s versatile too, with the neck pickup allowing for numerous traditional clean and crunchy tones. And we’re glad to be able to report that we can see the potential of the guitar’s adaptability in the hands of many players. Sure, Run To The Hills sounds brilliant, but this is certainly no one-tone pony.

The ultra-low action enables you to pull off all manner of speedy solos and the overall



The chrome pickup surrounds add some rock 'n' roll bling to the Murray Strat

The Rivals



Ibanez JEM VWH £2,299

One of the most successful signature models ever is still going strong, and no wonder – it plays exceedingly well and sounds great. The features may be more widely available now, but it remains at the top of any rock guitarist’s wish list, not just fans of Steve Vai.



Vigier Excalibur from £1,800

This excellent yet criminally underrated French model ticks all the boxes. With a lovely neck, low action and fulsome DiMarzio or EMG-driven tones, there’s a model for everyone. Also, a zero-fret is standard on all Excaliburs.



Suhr ‘Landau Spec’ Classic from £2,220

This is the epitome of a souped-up double cut. The alder body, sixties-style ‘C’ neck profile and a trio of Suhr pickups give a traditional feel mixed with a wonderful selection of tones. And, as Suhr remains a custom facility, the sky’s the limit as far as spec is concerned.



The Rivals



ESP GL-56 £1,599

More mainstream but with a definite custom vibe is this faux-aged S-type, based on George Lynch's first ever ESP guitar. With a huge yet very playable neck – plus a Custom Shop Seymour Duncan Pearly Gates in the bridge and a pair of ESP SS-120 single-coils to offer great tone – this is a real steal for the money.



Lakland Skyline Bob Glaub four-string bass £1,025

LA session player Glaub has worked with Jackson Browne and Rod Stewart and this bass is modelled after his '64 Precision. With an ash body, maple neck and Lindy Fralin split-coil pickup, this offers vintage sounds with a modern feel and contemporary looks.



Yamaha ATT Limited II Billy Sheehan signature bass £1,947

Billy's bass features an alder body, bolt-on maple neck and scalloped 'board to give a unique feel. While DiMarzio WillPower pickups at neck and middle positions with separate outputs provide a huge sound range. There's even a Hipshot D-Tuner, but it's a pricey axe.

Tight and tough, [the Precision's set-up] invites you to get stuck in, and when you hear the sound that's exactly what you'll want to do

performance is just as we'd expected – very impressive.

Fender Dave Murray Stratocaster

Back in issue 242, Dave gave us the story behind his original black and white Strat, a guitar that he'd recently removed from service.

"Yeah, that's been retired," he said with a smile. "I got it in 1976 through an ad in Melody Maker. I'd done some research and I thought, okay, this is it. I had a Les Paul at the time and I sold that, borrowed some money, and went for that Strat specifically because of the history behind it.

"I mean, I think I used it for something like the first five albums," he continues. "But we were touring a lot and it was a case of, Well, it's done me well, y'know? The newer guitars are good road guitars."

That guitar was an original 1957 Strat once owned by the late Free guitarist Paul Kossoff. Murray recorded many of Maiden's greatest songs with it and the pair of Super Distortions were, of course, retrofitted.

A late fifties Strat is certainly a very attractive article and, aside from the provision of two double cream DiMarzios, this is not as far removed from an original model as you may perceive. For example, the guitar is loaded with a three-way selector (albeit topped with a black rather than white switch cap), and the maple neck offers a 'V'-shape.

That said, this profile has been softened slightly and the subsequent feel, as we'll discover, does benefit the guitar's likely target audience.

The chrome pickup surrounds add some suitably flashy rock credentials and, although Dave uses Floyd Rose vibratos on his current stage axes, the classic vintage 'Synchronized' vibrato is more in keeping with the original.

Sounds

The basic bridge rock tone isn't as dark as that of the Jackson, which is interesting, but as we've said, the softer 'V' neck fills the hand far more comfortably than, for example, a Clapton Strat. Considering the complex music Maiden play, a more pointed profile could have really caused mobility problems and, as usual, the Strat is faultless in its playability.

A classic rock tone enjoys an almost breathy character that, when used for solos above the 12th fret, offers just the right amount of treble cut. When the volume is backed off a touch, there's a lovely warm and bluesy character to the sound.

However, Murray is best-known for his soulful solo use of the neck humbucker and, with a DP-103 (DiMarzio's version of the PAF) in that position here, the trademark tone is instantly evident, especially when it's put through our Marshall.

The guitar's versatility is cemented by the ability to select the central single-coil easily

and, with a more subdued tone, the guitar certainly possesses a number of more subtle voices even though no pickup combinations are possible. The use of a five-way switch would have increased that number.

Compared to the Jackson, tuning is obviously more of a potential issue here due to the lack of locking parts – Murray enjoys his strenuous dive-bombs too – but take the customary string-stretching steps and the guitar will be with you every step of the way.

Fender Steve Harris Precision bass

With two great guitarists swapping licks, Iron Maiden require a rock-solid foundation and Steve Harris has continually provided that with his trusty Fender Precision. The choice of hardware and pickups on this signature are more in keeping with Steve's own preferences than on previous signature models and, as a result, this one will certainly stand out in a crowd. Harris insisted that this should be a heavy bass with a chunky one-piece maple neck that nicely fills the hand. Naturally it's loaded with his Signature Series Rotosound Flatwound strings – the West Ham United colours of claret and blue in the silk windings at ball and tuner ends easily identify these.

The eye-catching pickguard is chromed to a mirror finish and surrounds the well-chosen Seymour Duncan SPB-1 vintage-correct split coil pickup. The practicality theme continues with the Badass II bridge, with its sleek looks and great intonation, and yet more chrome. On the headstock the trusty 'elephant ears' tuners have the more ungainly modern day long shank and are not reverse action. Steve's signature is at the back of the headstock. All in all we get a great looking, and very practical P-bass.

Sounds

Even without plugging this in you can tell it's going to perform well as it's been set up for hard rock playing – a good action, but a little higher than you might expect. Tight and tough, this invites you to get stuck in, and when you hear the sound that's exactly what you'll want to do.



The mirrored scratchplate houses a Seymour Duncan SPB-1 split-coil

Harris is a finger player and likes working the strings at the bridge end for a tight sound and punchy delivery, but he sweetens up for chordal stuff by playing over the pickup. This is the simple beauty of the Precision – it always sounds great wherever you shift your playing position to.

With his low-slung playing style and 'fast fingers' action, Harris is one of the most influential players of the heavy metal world and the SPB-1 pickup is what he currently uses on his own bass. We feel it works a lot better with the flatwounds than the SPB-3 Quarter Pounder used on the earlier signature model. This is a really great combination that

offers a pleasingly vintage element to the sound, which should also appeal to far-from-metal Motown lovers. The flatwounds do suffer from individual note clarity but provide a superior thump and tonal fatness than the more common roundwounds do. In the right hands, this is a formidable instrument.

Verdict

Bass guitars are rarely flashy looking but with its blue sparkle finish and mirror scratchplate this Precision is a real attention grabber. It has a great feeling of 'rightness' about it when you play it and the set-up is far more 'on the road' than 'in the shop'. That may take the less

experienced player by surprise but, of course, it can be easily tweaked to your own style; likewise the strings.

The six-strings too offer a lot more than guitars for Maiden fans. They are both great rock axes that have quality oozing from every fret. A high-end electric is still the dream that players aspire to and, if you enjoy full-blooded rock combined with more subdued styles when the occasion calls for it, either model will suit you down to the ground.

Yes, both are pricey, but we'd suggest that each offers enough of its own merits and exclusivity to be worth it: these are high-end US signature guitars, after all. The same applies to

the bass – there are cheaper options out there, but few that rock quite as hard.

The Jackson offers a neck with a feel that's totally at one with any rock player's needs. Meanwhile the Dave Murray Strat – although far more traditional in vibe – is different enough in both tone and feel to a traditional hot-rod Strat to ensure a level of popularity outside Iron Maiden fans. Both are versatile, play wonderfully and offer more than their fair share of impressive and individual tones.

Considering the sheer legacy that Murray, Smith and Harris share as players, what's good enough for them to use is no doubt more than good enough for the likes of us. We suggest you reach out... **G**



Guitarist CHOICE



Guitarist CHOICE

The Bottom Line

Jackson Adrian Smith San Dimas DK

We like: Superb neck; equally impressive overall performance and tones

We dislike: The price may put some people off

Guitarist says: This is a pro-standard USA-made custom guitar and will have most rock players slaving at the bit. Charvel last issue, Jackson this – rock is back!

Fender Dave Murray Stratocaster

We like: Blending a '57 Strat with rock sounds and more

We dislike: A five-way pickup selector would increase the palette of sounds

Guitarist says: Finally, an official USA-made version of the Murray Strat is with us, and it's worth the wait

Fender Steve Harris Precision bass

We like: Striking looks; solid sound; meaty feel

We dislike: Modern-style tuners – old reverse action is our preference

Guitarist says: Harris fan or not, this is a great P-bass. The strings, bridge and pickup combine very well

Jackson Adrian Smith San Dimas DK

PRICE: £1,799 (inc case)
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: Double-cut signature solidbody electric
BODY: Alder
NECK: Maple, bolt-on
SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5-inch)
NUT/WIDTH: Locking/43mm
FINGERBOARD: Ebony, 305-406mm (12-16-inch) compound radius
FRETS: 22, jumbo
HARDWARE: Floyd Rose Original double locking vibrato; Gotoh tuners – all black-plated
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 53mm
ELECTRICS: DiMarzio DP-100 Super Distortion; two Fender SCN single-coils; five-way lever pickup selector switch; volume and tone controls
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 4.13/9.1
OPTIONS: Also available with black pickguard and maple 'board (£1,799)
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISHES: Snow White only
Fender GBI
01342 331700
www.jacksonsguitars.com

Test results

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

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

Fender Dave Murray Stratocaster

PRICE: £1,719 (inc case)
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: Double-cut signature solidbody electric
BODY: Alder
NECK: Maple, bolt-on
SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5-inch)
NUT/WIDTH: Synthetic bone/42mm
FINGERBOARD: Maple, 241mm (9.5-inch) radius
FRETS: 21, medium jumbo
HARDWARE: Fender USA Vintage vibrato; Gotoh vintage-style tuners – all chrome-plated
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 57mm
ELECTRICS: DiMarzio DP-100 Super Distortion (bridge); Fender Stratocaster vintage-style single-coil (middle); DiMarzio DP-103 PAF (neck); three-way lever pickup selector switch; volume and two tone controls
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.5/7.7
OPTIONS: None
RANGE OPTIONS: Many, including Fender American Vintage '57 Stratocaster (from £1,529); Fender Road Worn '50s Stratocaster (£899)
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISHES: Black only
www.fender.co.uk

Test results

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

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

Fender Steve Harris Precision bass

PRICE: £1,139 (inc gigbag)
ORIGIN: Japan
TYPE: Double-cut signature solidbody bass
BODY: Alder
NECK: One-piece maple, bolt-on
SCALE LENGTH: 864mm (34-inch)
NUT/WIDTH: Plastic/42mm
FINGERBOARD: Maple, 184mm (7.25-inch) radius
FRETS: 20, medium jumbo
HARDWARE: Leo Quan Badass II bridge; chrome mirror finish scratchplate
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 20mm centres
ELECTRICS: Seymour Duncan Basslines SPB-1 Vintage P-bass split-coil; volume and tone controls
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 4.3/9.4
OPTIONS: None
RANGE OPTIONS: Fender American Vintage '57 Precision (Olympic white £1,769, sunburst £1,719); Fender Road Worn Precision (sunburst £1,049, Fiesta red £1,019)
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISHES: Royal Blue Metallic Sparkle only

Test results

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

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★