



SQUIER J MASCIS JAZZMASTER

£430

Don't be fooled by the name: this Dinosaur Jr. Jazzmaster bites like a T. rex...

JUST as 'jazz mags' aren't really about jazz, the Fender Jazzmaster isn't strictly aimed at cappuccino-sipping noodlers in polo neck sweaters. Truth is, the guitar's offset design left the jazz fraternity cold on its launch at the 1958 NAMM show, but its resurrection arrived in the late 80s, when it became the alt-rock Excalibur. In this role, it was wielded by a club of awkward young men, including Robert Smith, Thurston Moore and J Mascis. "It's all I could afford at the time," recalls the Dinosaur Jr. man. "Les Pauls are too smooth. I like the guitar to fight back."

Never a flagship model, the Jazzmaster has drifted in and out of fashion, and there's not a huge choice in 2012. Even Fender's version of Mascis's signature model is now out of production, replaced by this entry-level Squier. It seems like a steal compared with the Fenders, which kick in circa £600, but less so next to Squier's Vintage Modified Jazzmasters, with their RRP of £334.

Anyone who's seen Mascis's Jazzmasters will be disappointed by the anaemic look of this model, whose vibe isn't so much grunge as *Goodfellas*. Visually, a reverse-of-headstock squiggle is Mascis's only contribution, although he's clearly been consulted in the decision to ditch the old-school and notoriously buzzy bridge for an Adjusto-Matic (a mod he makes to his own Jazzmasters). It's a small point, but makes this model feel more steady and road-worthy.

Jazzmasters and Jaguars are often lumped together, but they offer a massively different playing experience. This Mascis model has a standard 25.5-inch scale, and although it's only got 21 frets, there's a real sense of control and a tight feel to this C-profile neck. What's more, there's jumbo fretwire to support the frantic soloing you'll want to nail if you're

a fan. The vibrato bends smoothly and snaps back to pitch, while the weight distribution is bang on whether you're sitting or standing.

The best thing about this axe, though, is that the classic Jazzmaster switching system hasn't been watered down. You'll find it confusing to start with, but it's endearingly kooky. With the black slider switch disengaged, pickup selection and tone control are as per normal, using the three-way selector and lower controls. Engage the slider switch and only the neck pickup functions, with dedicated roller controls for volume and tone (it also sounds warmer). If it seems fiddly, consider the advantages at a gig, where you can be scorching on a white-hot lead and then flick instantly to a super-mellow rhythm sound (with brightness and volume preset). It's a feature that's not on the Vintage Modified Jazzmaster, and instantly justifies this Squier's price tag.

Versatility is one thing, but the knockout punch is the tonal quality. Similar in construction to the P90, these Jazzmaster singlecoil soapbars are wound wide. While they haven't got the classic Fender snap, they're clear, full and woody when clean, and break under distortion into a huge grunge grind. If you're bored of humbuckers and standard singles, you'll find them refreshing.

Similarly, in a world of Strats, Teles and Les Pauls (and derivatives), this Jazzmaster feels a bit different. However you feel about its creator, it's well worth getting your claws into.

Henry Yates

SUMMARY	FEATURES								
	SOUND QUALITY								
	VALUE FOR MONEY								
	BUILD QUALITY								
	PLAYABILITY								
OVERALL RATING		★★★★★							

AT A GLANCE

BODY: Solid basswood
NECK: Maple, bolt-on
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood with dot inlays
FRETS: 21
SCALE: 25 1/2"
PICKUPS: 2x Jazzmaster singlecoils (neck/bridge)
CONTROLS: 3-way pickup selector, tone circuit selector, master volume/tone controls, rhythm circuit volume/tone roller controls
HARDWARE: Chrome
LEFT-HANDED: No
FINISH: Vintage White
CONTACT: Fender GBI 01342 331700
www.fender.co.uk

1 PICKUPS

THESE twin Jazzmaster singlecoils make a pretty interesting racket, with a little more sonic width and swagger than your standard Fender items

2 BODY

THE offset Jazzmaster body looks awkward, but it hangs nicely on a strap and fits well on your lap

3 CONTROLS

THE dedicated controls for the rhythm circuit seem fiddly to start with, but this feature is great for switching between preset tones live

