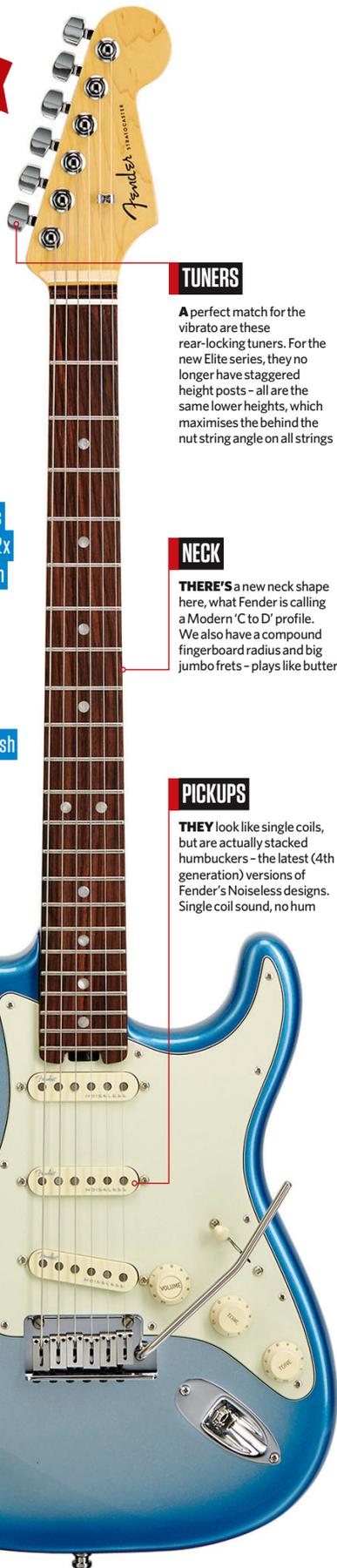




# FENDER AMERICAN ELITE STRATOCASTER £1,439

Fender's American Deluxes are dead. Long live the Elites



**THE** Elite series replaces the American Deluxe atop Fender's USA production tree and continues the latter's penchant for improved, rather posh versions of Fender's classics. For some, that's heresy, but the Elites are for guitar players with work to do.

Like the Deluxe, the Elite has a compound 9.5 to 14-inch radius fingerboard, which combines with bigger frets to stop string choking, while also making bending easier. Then there's the two-post vibrato with big block saddles, which are easy to adjust, and combined with locking tuners, create an excellent system. Throw in Fender's no-hum Noiseless pickups and its unique

Like the Deluxe, we get Fender's S-1 switching. There's a very unobtrusive and easy-to-engage push-switch housed in the soft-touch knob (another new Elite addition) of the volume control. With the switch up, it's Strat as usual: the three individual pickups plus the two combined parallel linkages – bridge and neck, and neck and middle. It's classic Strat: the pickups sound very open, uncompressed and single coil-like.

Push the switch down, however, and we have five new selections – like a different guitar. So, with the neck pickup position selected here, we have all three pickups on in series for a huge humbucker-like

## While it's far from cheap, it really is two guitars in one

S-1 expanded switch system and you have quite a guitar.

So, what's changed? Firstly, the neck shape, which Fender is calling a Modern 'C' to 'D' profile – as the name suggests, the 'C' of the lower positions morphs into a slightly fatter and flatter-backed 'D' as you move up the neck. It's really comfortable and makes higher fretwork easier. In fact, this writer's more vintage-spec Fenders feel like antiques. There's a new wheel truss rod adjuster here, too – a fast way of making tweaking the neck relief – and a contoured heel.

Another upgrade comes with the pickups. They look like any other staggered-height pole piece single coils, but are actually stacked-coil humbuckers. These fourth-generation versions, however, have been totally re-engineered to sound even more like real single coils but without the hum and buzz. The previous versions were pretty good; these are better!

sound. In middle position, the bridge and middle are linked in series, and again, it's big and beefy; likewise, the darker neck and middle series selection. The first two selections are more complex in terms of the electronics and subtler in sound, but it doesn't serve to diminish the Jekyll and Hyde character.

The Elite Strat starts at £1,389 depending on finish; it's available with a maple or, as here, a rosewood fingerboard, and while it's far from cheap, it really is two guitars in one. The best improved Strat ever from Fender? Definitely. Leo would have been proud.

**Dave Burrluck**

<b>SUMMARY</b>	<b>FEATURES</b>	★★★★
	<b>SOUND QUALITY</b>	★★★★
	<b>VALUE FOR MONEY</b>	★★★★
	<b>BUILD QUALITY</b>	★★★★
	<b>PLAYABILITY</b>	★★★★
	<b>OVERALL RATING</b>	★★★★★

- AT A GLANCE**
- BODY:** Alder
- NECK:** Maple
- SCALE:** 648mm (25.5")
- FINGERBOARD:** Rosewood
- FRETS:** 22 jumbo
- PICKUPS:** 3x Fender Deluxe Noiseless single-coil-sized humbuckers
- CONTROLS:** 1x volume (w/ S-1 switch), 2x tone, 5-way lever pickup selector switch
- HARDWARE:** Chrome-plated
- 2-Point Deluxe vibrato, 'short post' cast/sealed locking tuners
- LEFT-HANDED:** Yes, £1,509
- FINISH:** Sky Burst Metallic (shown), 3-Colour Sunburst, Aged Cherry Burst (ash body), Tobacco Sunburst (ash body); Mystic Black, Olympic Pearl & Autumn Blaze Metallic (£1,389)
- CONTACT:** Fender GB 01342 331700  
www.fender.com

**TUNERS**  
A perfect match for the vibrato are these rear-locking tuners. For the new Elite series, they no longer have staggered height posts – all are the same lower heights, which maximises the behind the nut string angle on all strings

**NECK**  
**THERE'S** a new neck shape here, what Fender is calling a Modern 'C' to 'D' profile. We also have a compound fingerboard radius and big jumbo frets – plays like butter

**PICKUPS**  
**THEY** look like single coils, but are actually stacked humbuckers – the latest (4th generation) versions of Fender's Noiseless designs. Single coil sound, no hum