Guitarist PRESENTS

UPDATED EDITION
148 PAGES OF STRATS
EXPLORE THE BEAUTY AND VERSATILITY OF LEO FENDER'S MASTERPIECE ELECTRIC

FENDER STRATOCASTER HANDBOOK

THE DEFINITIVE GUIDE

TO FENDER'S GREATEST ELECTRIC GUITAR

STRATOCASTER HISTORY
ICONIC STRATS & RARITIES
STRAT HEROES PICKUPS & HARDWARE CUSTOM SHOP
TONE UPGRADES RELICS
UNIQUE STRATS GREATEST TONES PLAYER INTERVIEWS
GUITAR GALLERIES

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70 YEARS OF THE STRAT

Welcome to

FENDER STRATOCASTER HANDBOOK

The *Fender Stratocaster Handbook* is a celebration of the contribution that Fender's electric guitar has made to musicians and musical culture in the 70-plus years since the company's first Strat left the factory in 1954. Since then, this once-tiny musical instrument company in California has developed into an international corporation and a household name, as has its most famous creation – the timeless, somehow always relevant Stratocaster. Find out how Fender's Stratocaster was developed, and get up close and personal with some of the rarest and most valuable Strats ever played and displayed. Study the techniques of the players who made the Stratocaster famous, from Buddy Holly and Hank Marvin to Jimi Hendrix and Eric Clapton. We also speak to some famous players indelibly linked with their iconic Strats, name some of the greatest Strat tones of all time, and we'll also be offering a few tips on how to squeeze the most from the tone of your own guitar, too.

FENDER STRATOCASTER HANDBOOK

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CONTENTS

HISTORY

10 ..... **Fender: The Early Years**
16 ..... **Origin Of The Species**
22 ..... **Ultimate Strats**
34 ..... **Stratocaster Tones**

ICONIC STRATS

38..... **Rory Gallagher's 1961 Fender Stratocaster**
40..... **The Black Strat**
44..... **Eric Clapton's 'Blackie'**
48..... **Stevie Ray Vaughan's 'Lenny'**
50..... **The Hitmaker**
52 ..... **Bridging The Gap**

70TH ANNIVERSARY

60..... **The Strat At Seventy**
62..... **The Soul Of A Strat**
68..... **Strat's Life**
82..... **Project Makeover**
86..... **Form, Function, Finesse**

HEROES

92..... **Strat Legends**
108..... **Hank Marvin**
114..... **Jimi Hendrix**
126 ..... **Eric Clapton**
132..... **Gary Moore**

HISTORY

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10 ..... **Fender: The Early Years**
16 ..... **Origin Of The Species**
22 ..... **Ultimate Strats**
34 ..... **Stratocaster Tones**

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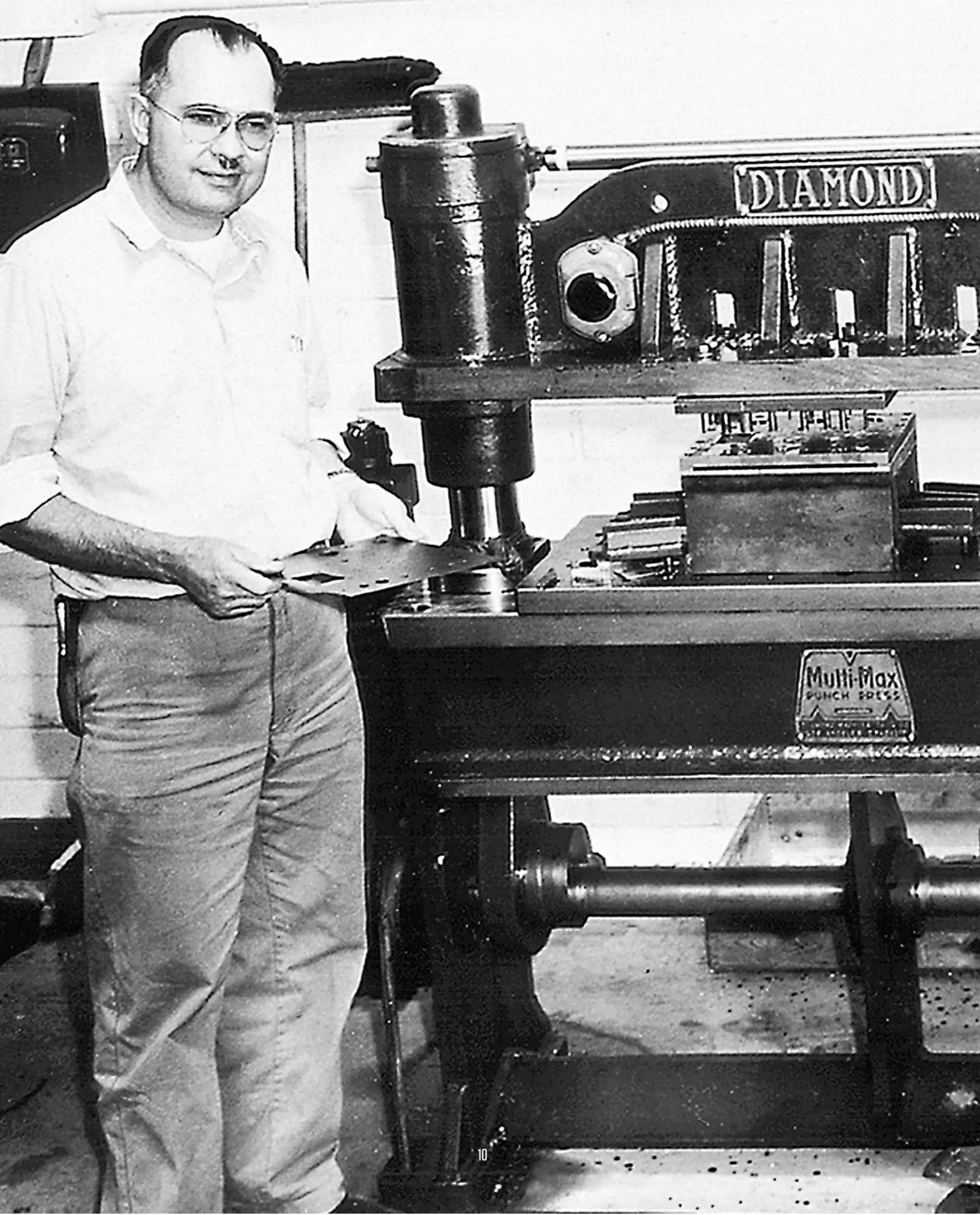

FENDER

the early years

In post-war California, a modest start-up electronics business began cranking out lap-steels and amplifiers for the US music market. Its boss, Leo Fender, may not have been a musician, but he certainly listened to them. His engineer's vision, combined with a team of smart people, a tireless work ethic and a forward-thinking view of the market all combined to create a prototype for a solid-body guitar that would change the sound and direction of popular music…

ELECTRIC INNOVATOR

Leo Fender's company started almost 70 years ago making steel guitars and modest amps: within three years, he had a guitar prototype that would change everything…

WORDS TONY BACON

When Leo Fender and his colleagues launched the first Fender solid-body electric guitar in 1950, almost everyone who saw it thought he'd gone mad. Fender's early amplifiers were good, but a solidbody guitar? Every player knew that guitars were hollow. They had air inside. That was obvious: they were light, and there were holes on the top to let the lovely sound out. Every maker knew that it took craftmanship, skill and attention in order to build a guitar: bending the wooden sides, carving or pressing the top and back, carefully constructing a special box that transformed what guitarists played into beautiful sound.

Since the 1930s, Rickenbacker, National, Gibson, Epiphone and others had made some electric guitars. They were archtop hollowbody guitars with built-in pickups and controls, but (with honourable exceptions) they'd had little effect on players. Gibson set the style for the best hollowbody electrics and had just launched the accomplished ES-175.

Leo, however, was thinking outside the box. In fact, he decided to make a guitar with no box at all: a solidbody electric. Rickenbacker had launched a solid-ish Bakelite guitar in 1935, but it was small and awkward. Around 1940, guitarist Les Paul built himself a trio of guitars with solid through-necks. And in 1948 – about 15 miles west of Fender's operation in Fullerton, California – Paul Bigsby built an electric with a solid through-neck for guitarist Merle Travis.

Leo Fender's new solidbody guitar – at first called the Esquire, then the Broadcaster, and finally the Telecaster – was, in contrast to these experiments, aiming for commercial success.

LONE VISION, TEAM EFFORT

Leo had started his working life in the 1930s as an accountant. He'd been unfit for military service in World War II – losing an eye after a childhood illness – and during the war continued to run his radio store. When the war finished, he ran a short-lived company, K&F, making lap-steel electric guitars and amps with his friend, guitarist Doc Kauffman. But by 1946, he had a new operation called Fender Manufacturing. Leo continued to make the steels and amps, now with his new Fender logo, and expanded into new premises in Fullerton.

Doc had left the partnership because he was fed up with Leo's single-minded, workaholic ways. Leo was an introverted, hard-working man, prone to long hours and happiest when by himself, drawing up designs for another project or playing with a new machine. As far as he was concerned, the fewer people who got in the way of all this, the better.

And generally speaking, Leo was – according to Leo – the only one able to get such things done. Yet he wasn't even a player; Leo took a few piano lessons before trying the saxophone (never seriously), and never learned the guitar.

But he thought if there was a product on the market, he could build it better and cheaper – and make a profit in the process. Despite spectacular later successes, during the early years the new Fender company came perilously close to failing. It was Leo's sheer determination and his luck in surrounding himself with clever, dedicated people that would help it to overcome the problems in these difficult times.

Don Randall became a partner with Leo in the Fender company, heading up the sales arm of the business and becoming arguably the most important person in the development of Fender's success. George Fullerton joined Fender in 1948 and soon became what one colleague described as "Leo's faithful workhorse".

Leo's wife was important, too. Lack of cash flow was almost ever-present at Fender in the early days. There were times when it was hard to cash Fender cheques – especially if Esther Fender was late in receiving her wages from the phone company where she worked.

Bob Perine of the Perine-Jacoby agency took over Fender's advertising in 1957, starting the classic, 'You won't part with yours either...' series of ads. Forrest White joined the team in 1954 to take over the running of the Fender factory. He reorganised this vital part of the business into an efficient and effective production base.

MUSIC FOR THE MASSES

Fender's team was now in place and their mass-production techniques at the Fullerton factory worked a treat. There were all kinds of machines, some for winding pickups – Heath Robinson affairs with wheels and pulleys – while one area housed a few ad-hoc finish spray booths alongside a wall of racks for drying sprayed bodies. There were punch presses for making metal parts and benches for final assembly. A worker would screw on pickguards and bridges and tuners, and then another would take over and solder the electronics together. Finally, new guitars would be strung up and tested through a

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EARLY FENDER TIMELINE

1946
Fender Manufacturing founded: electric-steel guitars, small amps made

1949
Leo Fender builds prototype solidbody electric guitar

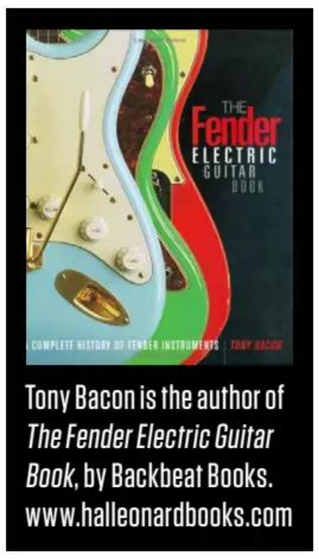
1950
The Esquire and Broadcaster models launched

1951
Broadcaster renamed the Telecaster; Precision Bass and Bassman amp launched

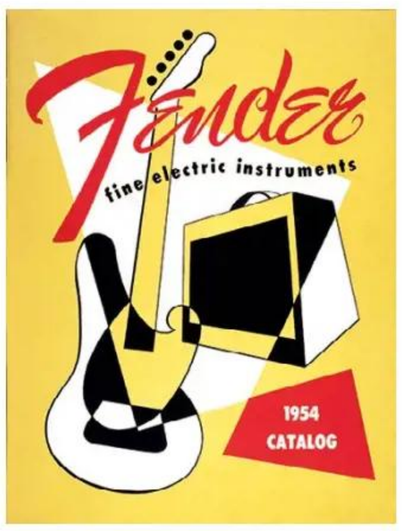
1954
Second electric model, the Stratocaster, launched

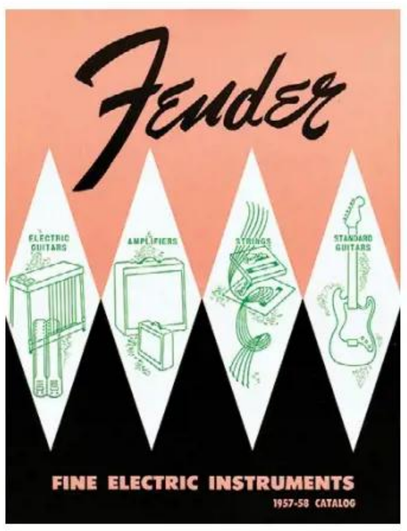
Fender amp that was lifted from the line. Most Fenders of the early 1950s came only in standard finish: blonde for Teles, Esquires and Precisions, sunburst for Strats. But by 1956, 'player's choice' coloured guitars became an option, and during the following year these DuPont paint finishes were appearing in Fender's catalogues as 'custom' colours, a label that has stuck ever since. Players began to see Fenders in Dakota Red, Lake Placid Blue, Inca Silver, Surf Green and the rest, but generally declined to hang such gaudy things around their necks. This means they now fetch small fortunes.

Fender entered the 1960s in buoyant form. In July 1962 the price-list included nine electrics (these were the Duo-Sonic, Esquire, Esquire Custom, Jaguar, Jazzmaster, Musicmaster, Stratocaster, Telecaster and Telecaster Custom) and three basses (Precision Bass, Jazz Bass, and VI), with 13 amps, five steel guitars and two pedal-steels completing the line-up. But come 1965, a surprise was lurking. Leo Fender would sell the company that still bears his name...



Tony Bacon is the author of *The Fender Electric Guitar Book*, by Backbeat Books. www.halleonardbooks.com





1958
The top-of-the-range Jazzmaster model launched

1959
Custom Telecaster/Esquire; rosewood fingerboards debut

1962
Jaguar model launched

1964
Mustang student model arrives; debut of Fender acoustic line

1965
Company sold to CBS corporation for $13 million

ORIGIN OF THE SPECIES

We put a pristine original 1954 Stratocaster under the microscope to uncover the intriguing spec details that set the earliest Strats apart from their latter-day descendants…

Take a really close look at a variety of Stratocasters built over the six decades that they've been manufactured and you start to realise that the Strat's iconic body shape, as well as hardware and other styling details, has drifted quite a bit from its original form over time.

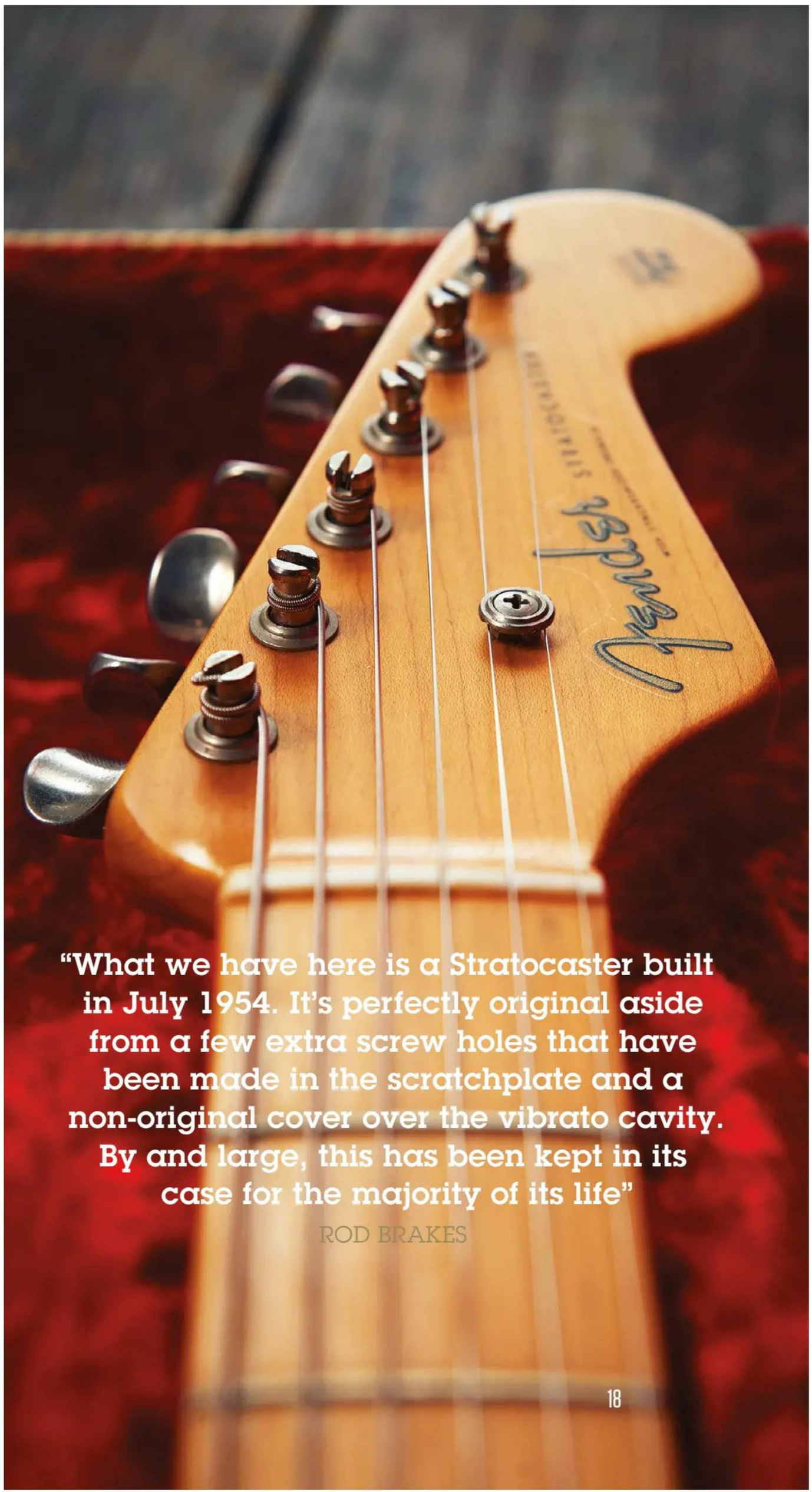
Indeed, it's only when you get up close to an original '54 Strat that you realise how much those apparently changeless contours have changed between the 50s and the present day. When Rod Brakes, then-proprietor of Vintage 'n' Rare Guitars in Bath, showed us a very clean '54 Strat in near-complete original condition, we took it as a cue to chart some of the subtle and not-so-subtle ways in which this most familiar of all electric guitars has evolved since the earliest examples appeared. With a little trepidation, we took up our screwdriver to peer under the hood of this elegant first-year-of-production example.

"What we have here is a Stratocaster built in July 1954," Rod explained as we began our examination. "It's perfectly original aside from a few extra screw holes that have been made in the scratchplate here at some point and a non-original cover over the vibrato cavity. There's a little bit of superficial fretwear. But by and large, this has been kept in its case for the majority of its life. The last 60-odd years it's been kept away. The finish has not faded at all. It still looks really rich and lush, as it was when it left the factory."

"They first started making Strats in earnest in May to June of '54, although there were some very early models made between April and March. This is number 522. During this early period of Stratocaster production, the dates on the body and the neck tended to match up very closely, often to within six months and sometimes within the same month. This one is actually marked 'TG July '54', which indicates that Tadeo Gomez [legendary Fender neck shaper] made it in July '54. The body is also marked as being made in July '54," Rod said of the hand-pencilled date on the neck, a hallmark of early Fender production, except in 1959 when the system was briefly suspended after an employee supposedly left some obscene remarks on one guitar's neck! Dating marks were later stamped in ink from '62 on.

Although the prices commanded by rare vintage guitars have stabilised somewhat in recent years, the most sought-after vintage Fenders and Gibsons are still worth a lot of money in pristine, original condition. Thanks to their bolt-on necks, old Fenders are especially susceptible to becoming 'bitsa' guitars over the years, as parts are chopped and changed by various owners, with the guitar losing some of its cachet, from a collector's point of view, in the process. So very careful examination of construction details needs to be made before one can be sure that a guitar remains in the original state in which it left Fullerton. Some of these clues can be gleaned from the finish.

"Often the finish hadn't really dried completely before the neck and body were assembled; sometimes



“What we have here is a Stratocaster built in July 1954. It’s perfectly original aside from a few extra screw holes that have been made in the scratchplate and a non-original cover over the vibrato cavity. By and large, this has been kept in its case for the majority of its life”

ROD BRAKES

it was still a little bit tacky. So, often, some of that finish will get stuck to the neckplate during assembly: you should see a mirror-image almost, like a fingerprint, on the plate. You'll also see those kind of matching imprints on the neck pocket and the neck itself," Rod explained.

Other clues come from residues found beneath seldom removed parts, such as the bridge, he added.

"On this guitar, there was finishing fluid, this reddish-tinted stuff Fender used to finish the guitars, and some of that was still visible just under the bridge, under the trim here."

DANGEROUS CURVES

But not all of the signifiers of a 1954 build like this one are so subtle. One of the most striking features seen on very early Strats are the graceful and gently rounded the contours of the body, which indicate the amount of skilled hand-work that went into shaping guitar bodies in the era before the degree of mechanisation increased. The belly carve, for example, is much longer than on later mid-60s Strats: it's less of a scallop shape and has more of a graceful, sweeping curve. The subtle radius on the edges of the headstock, and where it graduates into the neck, is also noticeably softer and is more gently sculpted than on later Strats, like an ice-lolly that's melted just a bit.

"Back then, Fender's production methods were significantly different from what we have nowadays," Rod continued. "It was like a workshop and there was more hands-on craftsmanship involved. You'll see that in things like the edges of the headstock, which are nicely rolled off. That only lasted a couple of years. I suppose when things ramped up, they become a little squarer. It was obviously time-consuming to do that degree of hand-finishing, so in time it disappeared. But it's really beautiful."

However, although some of the details of the early Strats were a bit more 'bespoke' than the more workmanlike models that followed in the 60s, many of the components were later upgraded to more durable alternatives, as it gradually became clear that the relatively primitive plastics used on pickup covers and other parts wasn't durable enough.

"They didn't get it all right to begin with," Rod argued. "Some of the original spec details were slightly flawed. To begin with, the pickup covers were made of polystyrene, otherwise known as Bakelite. It's pretty fragile and it looks different from the tougher vinyl or ABS parts that followed: it's a lot whiter and more translucent and marble-y looking. But these early parts are very, very fragile, especially over time. If a guitar has been played even a moderate amount you would expect to see cracks in those delicate materials."

The precise dimensions of familiar parts such as the volume and tone knobs are slightly different from the modern Fender norm, too.

"They're just slightly different dimensions, but very recognisable. The selector switch is also a rounder type of switch tip, often known as a 'football switch'. It looks like an American football, I guess. But the three-way pickup selector itself was actually kept by Fender until the late 70s."

Turning the guitar over, close examination of the vibrato block reveals more subtle differences when compared to later Strats.

"It's easy to see that on the trem block, the holes are drilled not so deep: the ball-end of the string is virtually at the surface of the block. Later on, they were recessed much deeper. They're often milled much more round as well on the edges there. It's a painted steel block. You can distinguish it fairly easily from later blocks."

A QUESTION OF HERITAGE

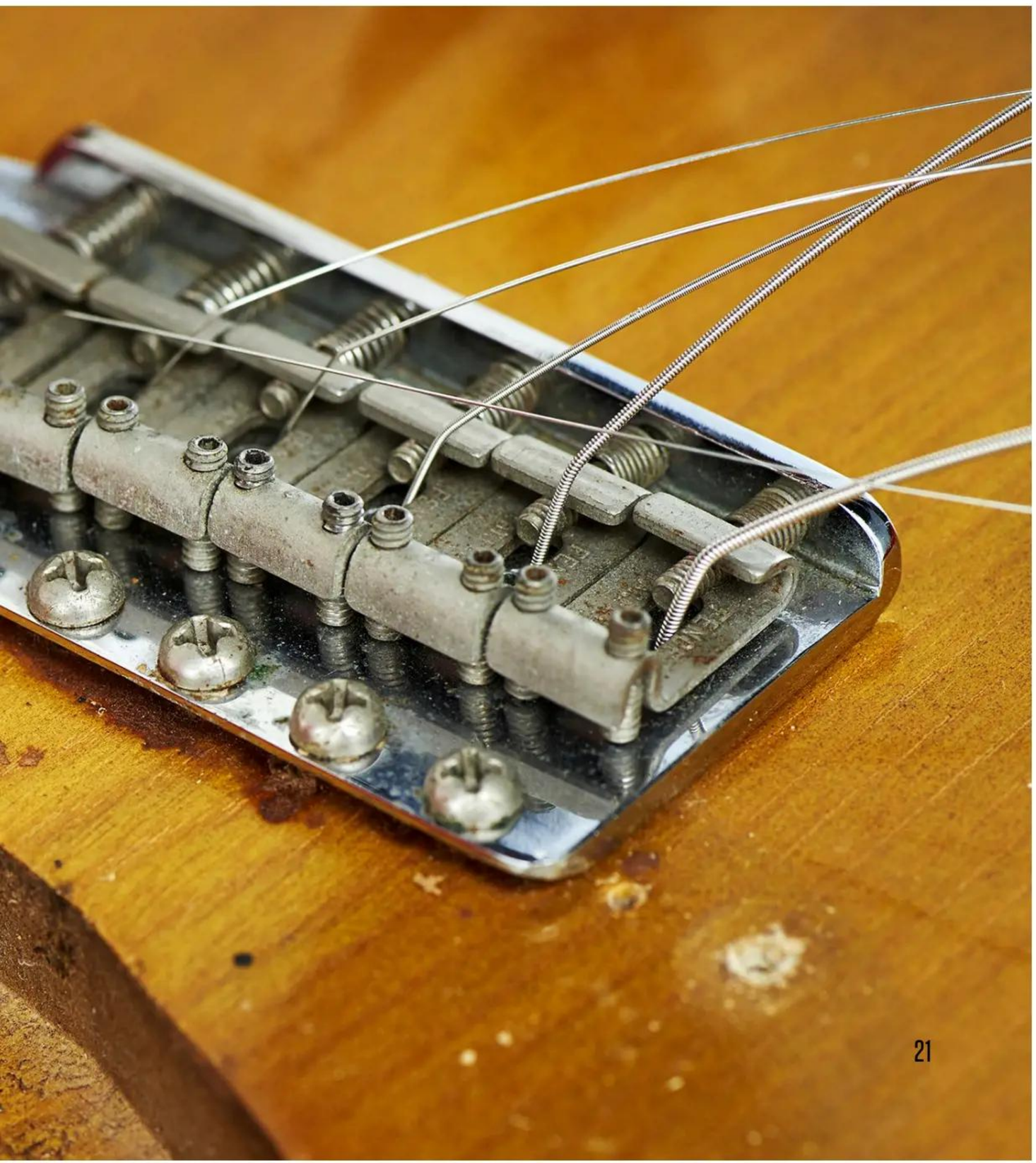
Viewed as a whole, the guitar is remarkably clean – so much so that fear of scuffing its glowing finish hangs over you a bit while you play, although as we found when we plugged it into a 'brown-panel' Fender Princeton, this Strat was harmonically rich and vibrant, while the bridge pickup was almost as ballsy and trebly as a good Tele's. Is it wrong to feel a little intimidated by such 'time machine' guitars? Should we find it sad, rather than attractive, that it is in such obviously unplayed condition? Or, at this stage in the game, is it in fact beneficial that a few near-perfect examples are preserved carefully for posterity, rather than played? It's a tough call. After all, while hardly common, there are tatty but great-sounding '54 Strats around that can show us what a great early Fender sounds like. Ultimately, only the owner of the individual instrument can decide what fate such instruments deserve: timepiece or working tool.

"It would be cool to preserve this guitar for future generations, I think," Rod offered after some thought. "I like guitars to be played as much as the next person, but I think sometimes you get certain [pristine] guitars and... they've gone over the edge of something: it's come too far to take them down the Dog & Duck and start playing in your band or whatever. These things are very, very rare. It's just really cool to see. I don't know what will happen to it in the end."

Thanks to Vintage 'n' Rare Guitars in Bath for their assistance in making this feature

"I like guitars to be played as much as the next person, but I think sometimes you get certain [pristine] guitars and... they've gone over the edge of something: it's come too far to take them down the Dog & Duck and start playing in your band"

ROD BRAKES



ULTIMATE STRATS

The Strat is the most famous electric of all time – the original guitar for all seasons. But which version represents the pinnacle of its evolution? We take a deep dive into Leo's masterpiece, in the company of experts, to try to find an answer...

WORDS JAMIE DICKSON PHOTOGRAPHY PHIL BARKER

Ever since its launch in 1954, the Fender Stratocaster has been, at once, the most recognisable electric in the world and the most mercurial. While Telecasters tend to deliver a somewhat familiar ride every time you pick one up, when you try a Strat for the first time it's harder to predict whether it will be light, pristine and bright – or dark, warm and gutsy. That's partly because, beneath the skin, the model has changed like a chameleon through the different phases in its evolution.

With the landmark of model's eighth decade in production now reached, we began thinking about whether it's possible to crown a particular point in the Strat's storied life where it had reached perfection, the peak of its evolution as a design. A point before which everything was a work in progress – and after which everything was merely a variation on a theme. To help us answer this slippery question, we enlisted the help of some true Strat aficionados to try to identify the point at which the model reached its apex – if that exists in any meaningful sense – while gaining fresh insights into this timeless design.

In a past issue of *Guitarist* magazine, we ran a detailed comparison between vintage guitars and their Custom Shop counterparts, so we're going to exclude reissues from the reckoning here, since they are essentially just modified copies of the original kit. Therefore, in this feature we're dedicating our focus to the seminal early decades of the Strat's evolution and see if we can chart where the original seed of Strat design reached its zenith.

IN THE BEGINNING

When considering any classic model of guitar, there's usually special reverence for the first of the breed – be it a 1950 Broadcaster or a 1952 Gibson Les Paul Model. But while such guitars are undoubtedly historic, it's also fair to say that rarely do they represent a fully mature design. The Les Paul, for example, would take half a decade to reach the archetypal maple/mahogany, twin-humbucker format that continues to the present, and even then it took until the 1980s for Gibson to stop tinkering with those fundamentals.

To an extent, the same could be said of the Strat in 1954. The ash-body, two-tone sunburst model that Fender debuted is undoubtedly a historic design. But

Fender
VOLUME
TONE
TONE

1

1. This 1963 Strat is deceptively rare as Foam Green has since become a popular colour for reissues

2. Abrasion wear on the lower horn reveals the Foam Green was sprayed over sunburst

FOAM GREEN 1963 FENDER STRATOCASTER

"This guitar came in from New Zealand," says collector Andrew Raymond. "That was in 2004 or 2005 and I've had it ever since. I pounced on it because it's such an unusual colour. I'd never seen one up until that point and I haven't seen another Foam Green Strat since – I'm sure there are some around, probably in the States, but it's such an unusual colour because [60s guitar-buyers] preferred blues and reds and not those sorts of finishes. But it has been played, which you can see when you examine it."

Andrew says the Foam Green finish was applied in the factory over a previous sunburst finish, a not-uncommon phenomenon with custom colour Fenders.

"Fender didn't like wasting anything," Andrew says. "So if there was a flaw in, say, a sunburst finish, they wouldn't say, 'Let's do it again.' I think it was more likely they were thinking, 'We don't like custom colours because they're a pain for the production process – but if we've got to do them, put them over a [rejected] sunburst finish because it'll hide a flaw and then we can sell the guitar." So, to the best of my knowledge, that's how it came about."

2

it isn't fully representative of what the Strat was to become, as Mike Long, owner of vintage guitar specialist ATB Guitars, argues.

"'54 Stratocasters are a breed apart," Mike reflects. "I mean, it's not just that – it's what month in '54 a particular guitar was made as well, it's that anal. Because they vary quite significantly, in small details, from the very early '54s to the mid-'54 examples to the late '54s. Generally speaking, 1954 Strats tend to sell for an awful lot more money [than other years of production] and they're very desirable. But I personally don't think they're the best Strats. We've had a few '54s [at ATB]; they're good, but I think they have more appeal to the collector, rather than the player."

Guitarist contributor and vintage restoration expert Huw Price agrees, arguing that many features that initially appeared on 1954 Strats were abandoned in the months that followed the model's launch.

"The 1954 Strats that I've played had quite bulbous necks. They didn't seem as refined as the Telecasters from that era, in terms of the playing feel," Huw tells us. "And with the early '54s, they hadn't really settled the pickup design, either. I think they were using Alnico III magnets and they also had wider slugs as well. So the pickups were still a work in progress. The very earliest ones supposedly had 100k control pots, too," he says,

"Fender didn't like wasting anything, so they would rather put [custom colours] over a rejected sunburst finish to hide a flaw"

ANDREW RAYMOND

explaining why 1954 Strats can sound quite different from what we might expect of Strats today.

Andrew Raymond, owner of Vintage 'n' Rare Guitars in Bath, argues that it didn't take long for Fender to respond to customer feedback and rejig the specs into something that feels like the first truly classic Strat – around a year, by his reckoning.

"'54s are sort of on their own, really, because they're more or less prototypes in a way, and the necks aren't that nice on them – very round," Andrew says. "But 1955 is a great year, I think. When Joe Bonamassa played my 'Grainger' 'Burst at Cardiff seven years ago, I looked at his guitar rack and I saw a '55 Strat and said, 'Can I have a go?' and he said, 'Yeah, no problem.' Playing it, I thought, 'This neck is fantastic.'

However, Huw Price sounds a note of caution regarding the playability of fully original mid-50s Fenders.

"It's important to realise that the frets on a lot of early Fenders, probably up to about '56, can be absolutely tiny. Really low, narrow frets that are not really conducive to anything like the playing that most of us have been doing since the late 50s."

Hence, most of the mid-50s Strats in use with top musicians today have been refretted to suit modern playing styles at some point. All things considered, while the earlier 50s Strats remain rightly significant and sought after as historic instruments, we probably need to keep walking along the path of Strat evolution to find the peak.

Buddy Holly was the original 50s Strat hero and one of the first big stars to use one, acquiring his first in 1955. Early Strats can play and sound a little unfamiliar in modern hands

PHOTO BY JOHN RODGERS/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

THE LATE 50S

The most obvious feature of 50s Strats, their all-maple necks, lasted until nearly the end of the decade. And some believe that the last of the maple-necked Strats still represent an all-time high-water mark in Strat design.

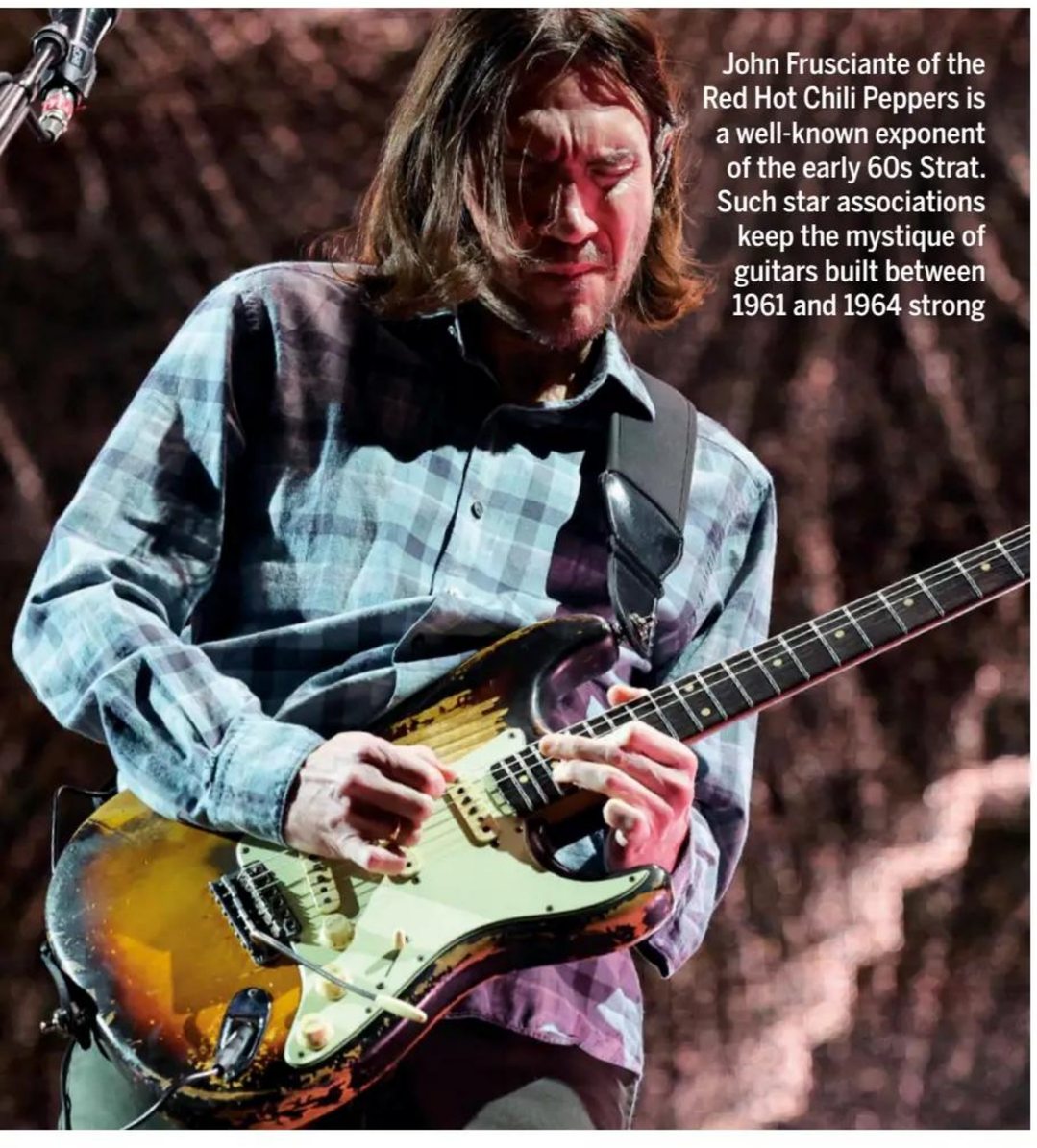
"1957 is probably the most popular year for maple necks, mainly because of the V profile," says Mike Long of the model's enduring appeal. "Also, [the neck of] Clapton's Blackie was a '57," he adds.

In some ways (the Clapton factor notwithstanding), the classic status of '57 Strats is a bit surprising as they also feature that most 'Marmite' of neck profiles. Andrew Raymond says he's become a fan of the '57's vintage V neck profile over time, but it wasn't immediately comfortable.

"It took a lot of getting used to, but now I love it," he says. "But by '58 and '59 Fender went to more of a rounded neck instead."

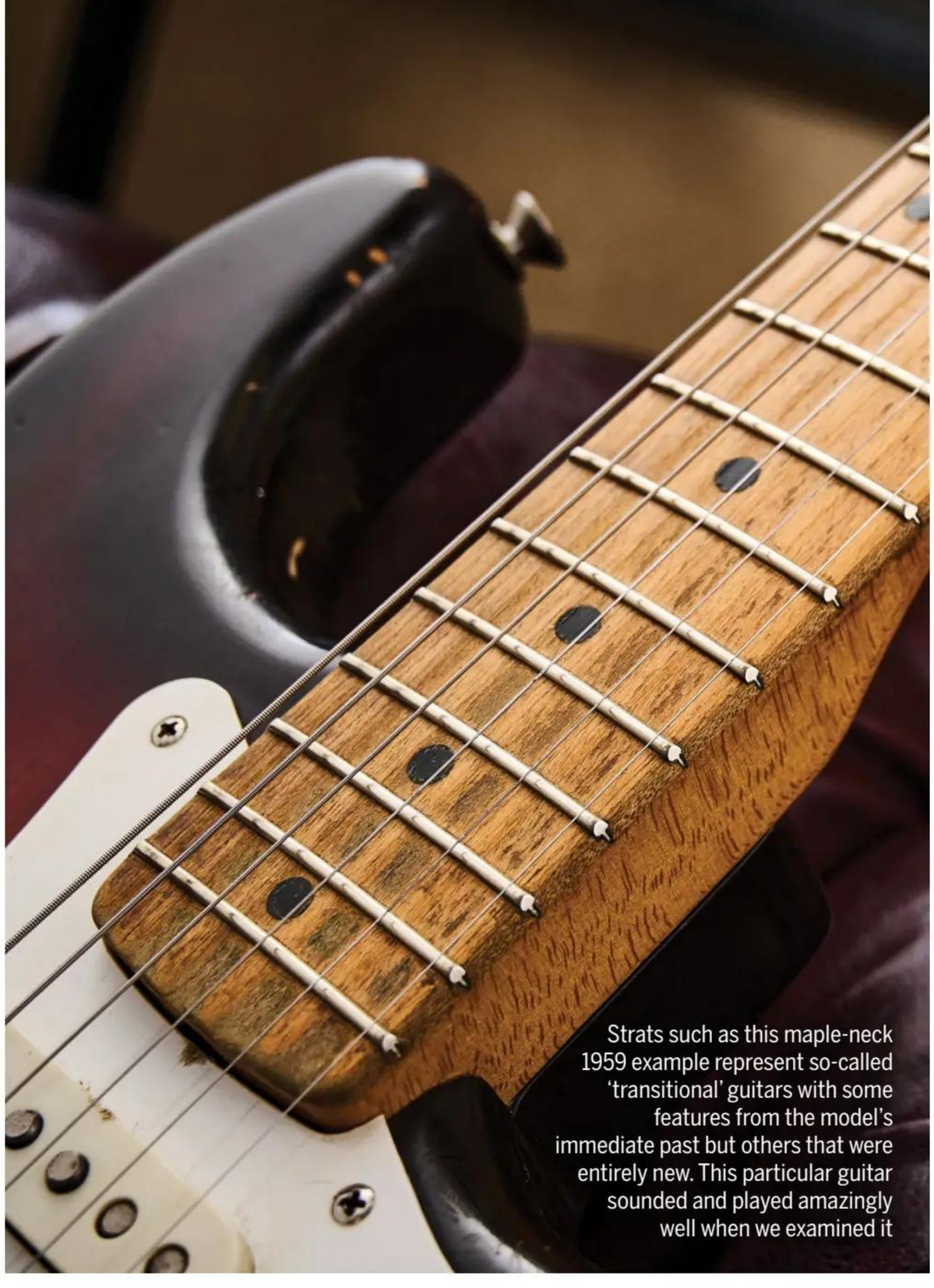
Huw Price says that whatever the neck profile, Fender was putting a lot of effort into making Strats as beautifully contoured and ergonomic as possible at that time.

"If you look at the Strats of that period, the bodies are so sculpted and the contours are so finely carved," says Huw. "The tummy tuck at the top edge is just so thin compared with earlier and later bodies. Similarly, the arm chamfer comes down so far. So those Strats often have very, very heavily sculpted bodies that are just beautiful to behold."



John Frusciante of the Red Hot Chili Peppers is a well-known exponent of the early 60s Strat. Such star associations keep the mystique of guitars built between 1961 and 1964 strong

PHOTO BY ETHAN MILLER/GETTY IMAGES



Strats such as this maple-neck 1959 example represent so-called 'transitional' guitars with some features from the model's immediate past but others that were entirely new. This particular guitar sounded and played amazingly well when we examined it

Huw also points to another big spec change that occurred during this period – a change that arguably marks the point at which the Strat transformed from a dainty, sparkling clean machine to a guitar capable of hitting harder.

"By 1957, or actually late 1956, Fender made the transition to alder bodies. The Strat bodies prior to that were built of ash and it does have a different tone. I think a lot of people would perhaps prefer the alder bodies because it just seems to have a little bit more midrange, a little bit more heft to it. When you combine alder with a maple neck and the slightly weaker pickups of the time, it all seems to gel together really nicely. By comparison, weak pickups with ash can sound really sparkly and beautiful and clear – but may not have the kind of the weight or body [to the sound] that a lot of players prefer in a Stratocaster."

"A lot of people chase that great big, fat, powerful Strat tone… something you tend to find with the guitars from 1962 to '64"

HUW PRICE

THE ROSEWOOD ERA

By 1959, the era of the maple neck was (for the time being) drawing to a close. The nitro surface of maple necks wore through too easily and, while today's Relic fans may love that look, Fender likely wanted a more upmarket, durable look for the Strat. Thus, the now classic combination of rosewood fretboard and alder body was adopted, marking the start of what many today consider the peak period of pre-CBS Strat design. The Strats of this era are so popular, in fact, that the exact year when the Strat hit its 60s best is still keenly debated.

"1962 is a very popular year," says Mike Long of ATB Guitars. "I'm not sure why, but often if you've got a '60, '61 and a '62 Strat on the market, then people will tend to go for the '62. 1963 is also a very, very popular year. A lot of people say '63 was the year when all the stars aligned at Fullerton and they got the perfect Strat in terms of the pickups, in terms of the neck profile and in terms of the sound. And then from '64 onwards, it started to go downhill a little bit.

"A lot of people want a '63 Strat – so many people play them and the image of a beat-up '63 Strat is so cool. A perfectly mint '63 Strat maybe isn't quite so sought after, but a '63 Strat that is a little bit beat-up is a very desirable thing that people want. So I'd say '63 is the most popular."

Needless to say, the relative merits of spec changes made to the Strat during this period inspire a lot of debate, especially the difference between the thicker rosewood fingerboards of the earlier 'slab-'board' rosewood Strats versus the thinner, round-laminate 'veneer 'boards' that Fender adopted in August of 1962. Huw Price argues that the difference between them has to be considered in context of other changes being made to the Strat at that time.

"It's difficult when you start making assumptions about what impact slab 'boards or veneer 'boards have on tone because, at the same time, the [neck] profiles were also changing," Huw explains. "So in 1960 to '61 Fender was making really quite skinny necks, just as Gibson was going really skinny at that kind of '61/'62 era before fattening up again in the mid-60s.

"Personally, I like the veneer rosewood Strats best," he adds. "I associate those guitars with a slightly fuller, warmer, fatter tone. But whether it's attributable to the 'board or other factors, I don't know, because around about

“From 1959 through to late ’61, they used a different red in the three-tone sunburst that faded very quickly [which people tend to prefer today]”

MIKE LONG

SUNBURST 1959 FENDER STRATOCASTER

“This is an all-original 1959 Stratocaster,” Mike Long of ATB says. “It’s one of the last of the maple necks. Most ’59s you’ll see will probably have a rosewood ’board. So this would be one of the last of the maple-necks to leave Fullerton in ’59 before they went over to the slab rosewood. This particular guitar is all straight: original frets, original hardware, electronics, and in a really nice condition in an original tweed case.”

FIESTA RED 1962 FENDER STRATOCASTER

"This one I bought recently from the original owner's daughter in Newcastle," Mike Long of ATB Guitars says. "So it's an original Fiesta Red, it's not a Selmer refin like so many of them were. And one of the cool things about this guitar is it's Fiesta Red over Dakota Red, over Coral Pink, over Desert Sand. So Fender were probably glad when this one finally left the factory gates. But it was not uncommon for Fender to spray custom finishes over different colours."

Rarely has a finish been so desired and yet had such a convoluted history as Fiesta Red, which was itself a logical extension from lesser-known finishes that Fender trialled in the 50s such as Mandan Red, Roman Red and Fullerton Red. Ranging from a milky, pinkish colour to a hottish, almost orange tone, Fiesta's hue has wandered about quite a lot over the years

PHOTO BY PAUL NAYLOR/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

Hank Marvin of The Shadows was an incredibly influential player for a whole generation of British guitarists. His iconic Fiesta Red Strat spawned, as guitar folklore has it, a cottage industry devoted to refinishing imported Strats in that popular shade

’62 Fender was also changing the pickup design again – they changed the polepiece diameter, which became smaller, and that meant they could get more windings on the coil. So the pickups got a little bit darker and more powerful... I think a lot of people are chasing what they perceive as that great big, fat, powerful Strat tone. And to my ears, that’s something you tend to find more with the guitars from 1962 to ’64.”

POST-CBS & BEYOND

It’s an article of faith among some Strat aficionados that the instruments made before the CBS Corporation bought Fender in January 1965 are the best – and there is (with caveats) a sizeable grain of truth in that. But opinions on that score are changing; Andrew Raymond says the reputation and value of some post-CBS Strats have risen in recent years.

“When I started collecting 30 years ago, the cut-off [for desirability] was 1965. Small headstock with a transition logo, maybe. Anything after that, forget it. Well, that’s all changed completely in the last 30 years. Particularly white Strats from 1968 – the Hendrix Strat – those go for fairly serious money. But the quality was different in that period. I mean, we’ve had a few and Huw Price is actually [servicing and setting one up] for us at the minute, which is a ’69 – a really cool guitar and it plays great. Okay, it’s not quite the same as an early 60s Strat, but it’s still a really cool Strat. So, over a period of time, people’s perceptions and people’s ideas and opinions have changed. To take that a bit further, when I started collecting, people wouldn’t touch a 70s Strat with a bargepole. Now that’s different: early 70s Strats are going for reasonable amounts of money. So I think it’s the whole period thing, but that period now is getting extended.”

“Around ’62 Fender changed the polepiece diameter, meaning they could get more windings on the coil. So the pickups got a little bit darker and more powerful” HUW PRICE

Mike Long of ATB Guitars concurs, adding that it’s not true to say that Strats made in the (CBS-owned) decade between 1965 and 1975 are all duds – and it’s now widely accepted that such instruments often sound great and offer relatively good bang for your buck, should you be fortunate enough to be in a position to buy vintage.

“I think ’65s are good value for money at the moment and they can be really good,” Mike says, “especially if you get an early ’65. I’d agree with that. But from ’75 onwards, you start getting into quite dark waters. And by the time we get to the very late 70s, to be honest, they’re often pretty bad and usually very heavy as well.”

That opinion was borne out by our experience in the recent ‘Super 70s’ issue of *Guitarist* magazine (498) in which we interviewed guitarist Aynsley Lister about his working collection of early-to-mid-70s Strats, which

sounded incredible in his hands and lacked nothing as modern blues-rock tools. However, Huw Price says that you need to be aware of some key changes that Fender made to the Strat during the first decade of CBS ownership if you're to understand the tonal character of these guitars.

"I think there are a couple of watershed changes that Fender made," Huw says. "I think the first thing is that they changed the pickup magnet wire from heavy Formvar to plain enamel, which gives a somewhat different tone. So that's a big deal."

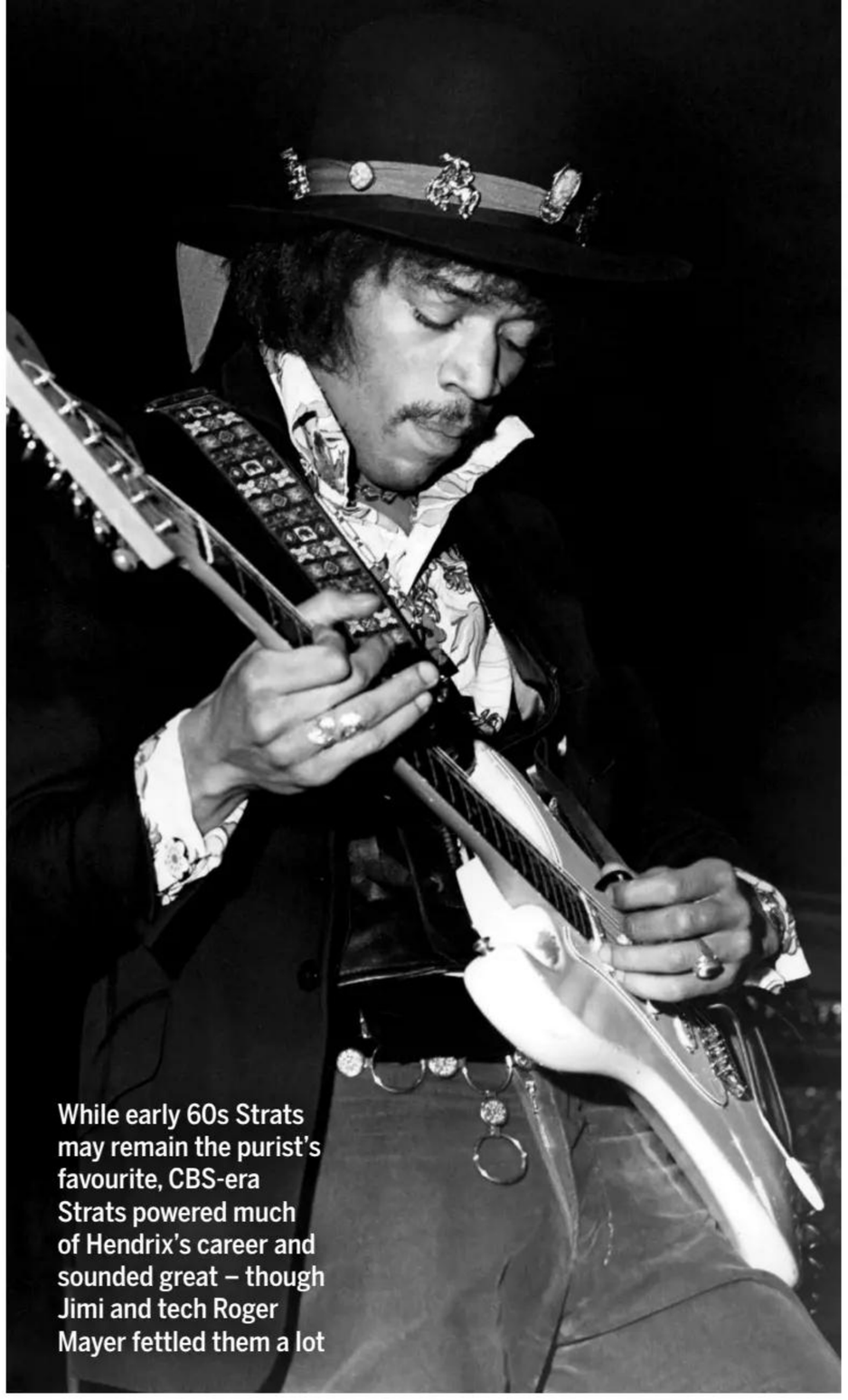
Mike Long of ATB agrees, saying: "I, and a lot of people who I speak to, favour the original black-bottom pre-CBS pickups with the Formvar wiring, before they change over to enamel. Those classic pickups from about '55 through to early '64 are fantastic. I think they're unbeatable."

"I think '65s are good value for money at the moment, especially an early '65. But from '75 onwards, you start getting into quite dark waters" MIKE LONG

But Huw Price adds that the later plain enamel pickups worked to better advantage when the Strat's traditional bridge design changed to a new format.

"Essentially, the bridge assembly remained unchanged through until the late 60s and early 70s – pressed steel saddles with steel blocks, which were joined to the bridge plate with screws," says Huw. "I mean, nothing really changed. But I think it's interesting that they were putting less magnet wire onto the pickups by the 70s, which made them cooler and presumably saved a little bit of money, too. The resulting pickups tended to sound brighter and glassier, and, in conjunction with steel blocks and steel saddles, they can give a Stratocaster quite a metallic tone. So that isn't necessarily the best combination for some people.

"Then in the early 70s, Fender went to a one-piece bridge," Huw continues. "I don't know what the block was made of – zinc or something like that – but, at the same time, they also went to Mazak [also known as zamak] saddles, which have a very different tone. People derided Mazak as 'monkey metal', but it's exactly the same stuff that all those ABR-1 bridges and tailpieces were made from at Gibson [in the 50s]. And Mazak has a really, really nice woody smooth tone, which arguably attenuates the top-end a little bit, which in combination with bright, underwound pickups can be a good thing."



While early 60s Strats may remain the purist's favourite, CBS-era Strats powered much of Hendrix's career and sounded great – though Jimi and tech Roger Mayer fettled them a lot

PHOTO BY VAL WILMER/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

Glimpses of the distinctively streaked grain of korina can be seen through chips and worn areas in this 1964 Strat's Olympic White finish

CONCLUSION

Our trawl through Strat history with the experts was illuminating, but you can't escape the feeling that, as far as individual taste goes, there can be no one 'ultimate' Strat because each player has different ears, hands and needs and so each person's notion of the 'perfect' Strat is inevitably different.

However, what is clear is that some historic versions of the Strat offer modern players a more relevant, all-round useful playing experience than others. Thus we can name 1970 to 1974 as a fertile period in which to find good-sounding, later-era vintage Strats. We can also name 1960 to 1964 as a particularly strong era in which to find punchy, midrange-rich Strats that perform incredibly well for the modern rock and blues player. And, going back a couple of years further, many would find the alder-bodied late-50s Strats just as compelling, if a little more springy and sprightly in character. Such guitars can also lay claim to being the most beautiful of all Strats, due to the amount of time lavished on sculpting and sanding their contours

While ash is still rightly regarded as a classic body material for Strats, alder arguably proved a better all-round tonal fit for the driven sounds of the rock era. Ultra-rare variants such as korina-bodied Strats hint at other directions Fender might have gone in – in fact, some of the earliest prototypes of the Strat, all the way back in 1954, trialled spruce bodies

"When I started collecting 30 years ago, the cut-off [for desirability] was 1965… that's all changed completely in the last three decades"

ANDREW RAYMOND

OLYMPIC WHITE 1964 KORINA STRATOCASTER

"They did a run of korina-body Strats in late '63 through early '64," Mike Long of ATB says of this ultra-rare variant of the mid-60s Strat. "They are usually from the same serial number range with the same pot codes and everything. And this is one of those. This was originally sold to South Africa and it's been with one owner from new. They do sound different to normal Strats – there's more sustain on a korina body and it's a denser sound as well. They're very rare. There's probably only a handful made and I have seen them sell for over £100,000."

Necks were slim in ’61, ensuring slinky playability, and as far as pickups go, no-one has ever suggested Rory Gallagher’s ’61 sounds bad, to say the least

Rory Gallagher’s unmistakable and stellar-sounding 1961 Strat provided the inspiration for our choice of ‘ultimate’ Strat. What would yours be?

– a level of detailing unlikely to be found on reissues. Some purely aesthetic factors have also shaped which years of production are today regarded as classics.

"1958 Strats don't tend to be that popular," Mike Long says. "Now, there's no difference in sound between '57 and a '58. The only differences are neck feel and the fact that 1958 was the first year of the three-tone sunburst – in that particular year, the sunburst was sprayed using a red that generally lasted the course of time. Whereas from 1959 through to late '61, they used a different red in the three-tone sunburst that faded very quickly [which people tend to prefer today]. So if you're looking for a bargain in pre-CBS Strats, you should probably look for a '58 because they're not as popular as '57 Strats. The unfaded finish makes them less desirable than both the two-tones that went before or the later three-tones that faded over time. And they've got a C-shaped neck, rather than a V-shaped one. So they're considered not as desirable as other ones, and hence prices aren't up there. But they sound exactly the same."

So, given all the variables outlined above, can we really identify an apex moment from the Strat's history? As we've seen, so many aspects of our appreciation of the Strat hinge on subjective factors. But we can probably identify a year that combines an optimum combination of woods, good pickups and high build quality. Hence, we'd humbly suggest 1961 as our peak year.

Why? Well, firstly you have a slab rosewood 'board and, all things considered, we'd choose that over a veneer 'board if only because its potential to be refretted without damaging the maple beneath is higher than with the thinner veneer 'boards. Necks were slim in '61, ensuring slinky playability, and as far as pickups go, no-one has ever

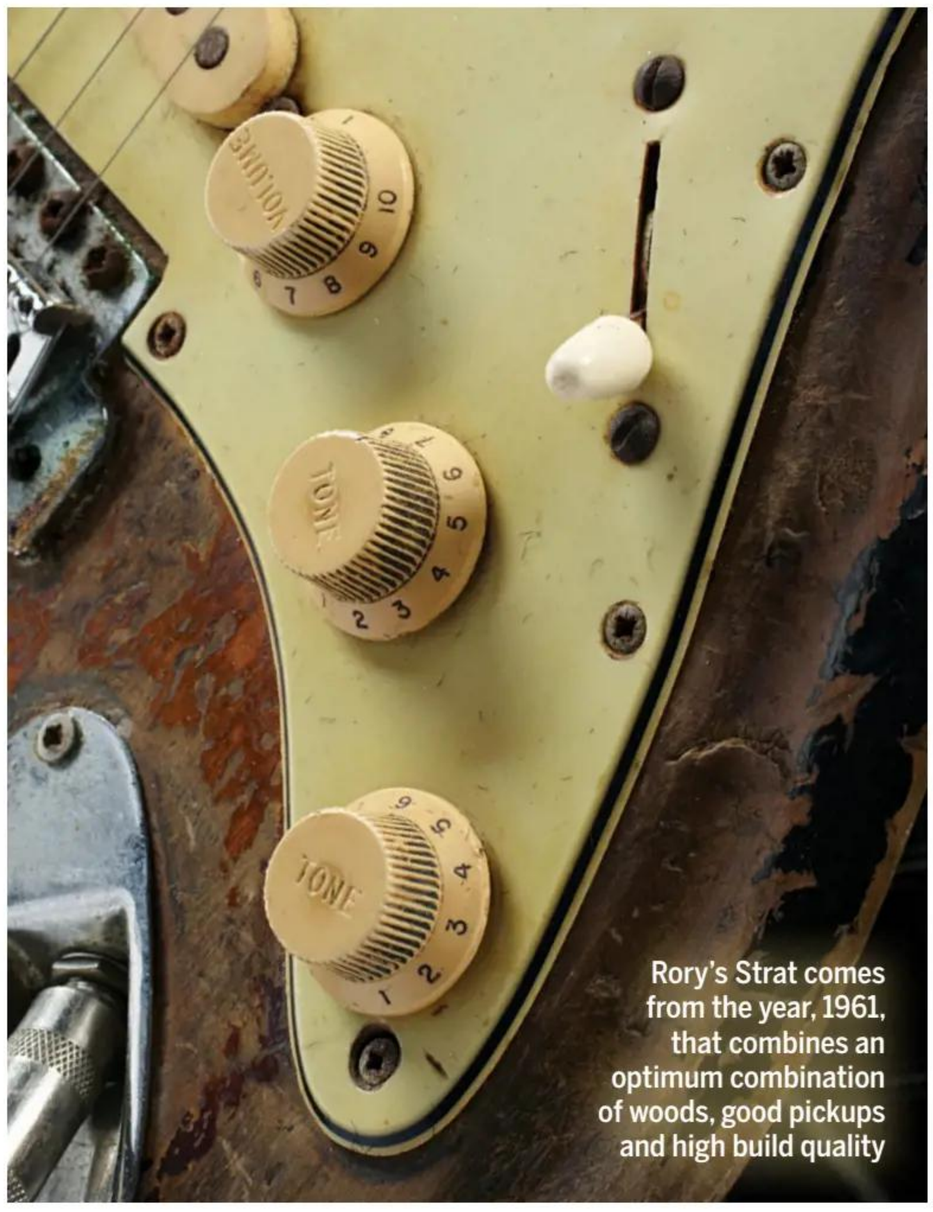
"If you're looking for a bargain pre-CBS Strat, look for a '58 because they're not as popular as '57 Strats... But they sound the same" MIKE LONG

suggested Rory Gallagher's '61 sounds bad, to say the least. Also, after 1960, you have access to the finishes found on Fender's first custom colour chart, from Olympic White to Foam Green, while the elegant contours of the body itself hadn't yet become as squat and burly as they became in the latter half of the 60s. And given that half the world wants a '62 or a '63, we can't help liking a '61 Strat for being a breed just slightly apart.

Finally, we're tempted to introduce a final curveball feature to our 'ultimate' Strat: a hardtail. So many players, from Bonamassa to Robert Cray, rate the Tele-like resonance and clarity a hardtail Strat can offer, as Huw price observes.

"Bonamassa's hardtail '55 is his favourite – he calls it the best Strat in the world," says Huw. "And I have played that one. And Billy Gibbons, of course, has been using that hardtail Strat of his since the beginning, on tracks like *La Grange* – it's a combination of Pearly Gates and his hardtail Strat. A hardtail Strat is taking you back more towards that Telecaster kind of approach."

Are the alleged tonal benefits of going hardtail worth the loss of the whammy bar and all the shimmer and shake that's such a hallmark of the Strat sound? Well, best argue that one out among yourselves... G



Rory's Strat comes from the year, 1961, that combines an optimum combination of woods, good pickups and high build quality

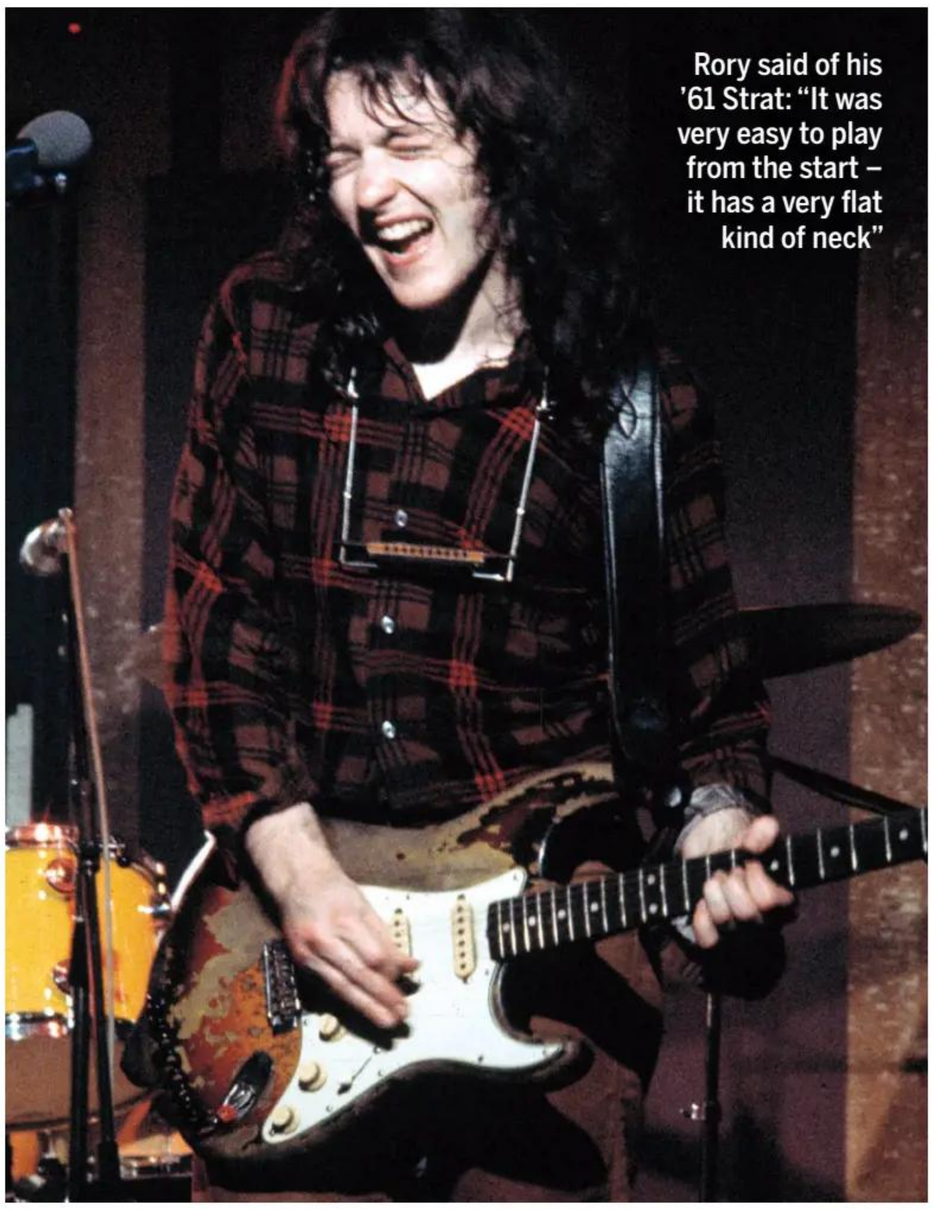

Rory said of his '61 Strat: "It was very easy to play from the start – it has a very flat kind of neck"

PHOTO BY JORGEN ANGEL/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

TEN GREAT

STRAT TONES

1 STEVIE RAY VAUGHAN & DOUBLE TROUBLE

COULDN'T STAND THE WEATHER

Couldn't Stand The Weather, 1984

1962 FENDER STRATOCASTER

For arguably his best guitar solo, blues firebrand Stevie Ray Vaughan set his battered Number One Stratocaster to stun, put it through a Tube Screamer, Marshall and Fender amps and a Leslie speaker cabinet, and reminded the early 1980s what a guitar should sound like. Its Sunburst finish was already worn when Vaughan bought it from Ray Hennig's Heart Of Texas Music shop in Austin, and though he'd refer to it as a '59, only the pickups were from that year.

© Alan Messer/REX Shutterstock

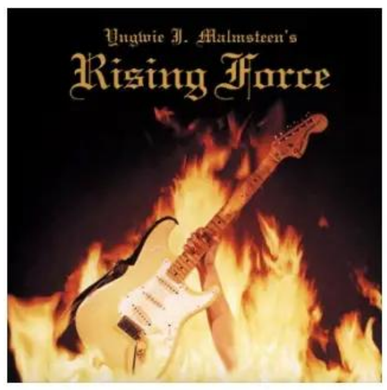
2 RORY GALLAGHER

WALK ON HOT COALS

Irish Tour '74, 1974

1961 FENDER STRATOCASTER

The blues is about pure emotion, and if you want to hear a Strat player giving their all, *Irish Tour* is a must. Rory's – said to be the first Strat to arrive in Ireland – was worked almost to destruction. Rory took a Tweed Fender Twin on the road for this famous tour, with a Vox AC30 and Dallas Arbiter Rangemaster Treble Booster: a key element to add bite to the Vox.



3 YNGWIE MALMSTEEN
FAR BEYOND THE SUN
Rising Force, 1984

1971 FENDER STRATOCASTER

Following his hero Ritchie Blackmore's lead, neo-classical shredder Yngwie scalloped the frets on his Strat for bigger bends. Named the 'Duck' (originating from the Donald Duck sticker and its yellowish hue), it featured two DiMarzio HS-3 pickups and a Fender single coil in the middle position for his landmark debut album, before Yngwie later replaced them with his signature DiMarzios.

4 ERIC CLAPTON | DEREK AND THE DOMINOES
LAYLA
Layla And Other Assorted Love Songs, 1970

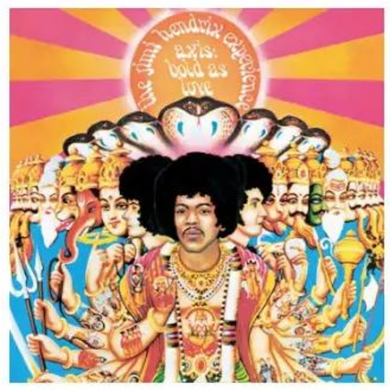
1956 FENDER STRATOCASTER

Clapton bought the Sunburst, maple-necked 'Brownie' in 1967, while he was still with Cream, and it was used on his solo debut and throughout the *Layla* album. Its most tonesome moment is arguably with a Fender Champ on the title track, which finds Clapton's Strat in equal billing and harmony with the late Duane Allman.

5 GEORGE HARRISON | THE BEATLES
NOWHERE MAN
Rubber Soul, 1965

1962 FENDER STRATOCASTER

Harrison and John Lennon acquired Sonic Blue Strats as The Beatles were recording *Help!*. Though used on *You're Going To Lose That Girl*, but here's probably the most overt example of a Strat on a Beatles recording: George and John are playing their Fenders in unison, with Harrison's ringing solo; his Strat would have a psychedelic makeover and become known as 'Rocky'.



6 JIMI HENDRIX
LITTLE WING
Axis Bold As Love, 1967

1960S FENDER STRATOCASTER

Hendrix's greatest Strat tone? It's timeless. The sensitive approach and composition of this ballad is majestic and compelling. Which is why so many other great players (SRV, Santana, Satch, Eric Johnson) can't resist attempting it. That watery warmth to the solo tone is because it was fed through a miniature Leslie speaker built by an Olympic Studio engineer.

7 JOHN FRUSCIANTE | RED HOT CHILI PEPPERS
UNDER THE BRIDGE
Blood Sugar Sex Magik, 1991

1958 FENDER STRAT

He may have played his '62 Jag for the video, but those tones speak Strat. And Frusciante's reliance on his '62 Sunburst Strat after returning to the band for the last time, shows how much the Hendrix fan values the model. The intimate intro here utilises the neck pickup with what could be an MXR compressor.

8 JEFF BECK
NADIA
Live At Ronnie Scott's, 2008

FENDER CUSTOM SHOP SIGNATURE STRATOCASTER

The players' player proves just how versatile and surprising the Strat can be in his hands, here playing fingerstyle Indian slide on a Nitin Sawhney composition. Controlling from the guitar, he ran through a relatively clean Marshall JTM45. Effects are minimal, though he did use the lusted-after Klon Centaur.

9 DOUG FIEGER | THE KNACK
MY SHARONA
Get The Knack, 1979

1972 FENDER STRATOCASTER

Great Strat tones aren't just leads. Fieger allegedly played every Strat for sale in LA before settling on his Sunburst '72 – its finish and maple neck inspired by the late frontman's admiration for Buddy Holly. It certainly makes its mark here on the monster hit he wrote for his band; the Strat bite punches that infectious riff through a Vox AC30.

10 DAVE MURRAY | IRON MAIDEN
POWERSLAVE
Live After Death, 1985

1957 FENDER STRATOCASTER

Murray's Strat was previously owned by his hero, Free's Paul Kossoff. It would become Murray's main guitar through a superb eight-album run for Maiden. He modded it with a black refinish and DiMarzio Super Distortions, but his tone was pretty pure here by his own reckoning: 50-watt Marshall with an MXR Phase 90.

Iconic Strats

ICONIC STRATS

38 ..... **Rory Gallagher's 1961 Fender Stratocaster**
40 ..... **The Black Strat**
44 ..... **Eric Clapton's 'Blackie'**
48 ..... **Stevie Ray Vaughan's 'Lenny'**
50 ..... **The Hitmaker**
52 ..... **Bridging The Gap**

CREST OF A WAVE

Few guitars are truly unique, as Rory Gallagher's '61 Strat is, bought during his time with a showband in his native Ireland. Pairing the Strat with a Top Boost Vox AC30, Rory went on to cement a reputation as one of the most intense, visceral guitar players in blues-rock history

Rory Gallagher's battered '61 Strat is the stuff of legend. Bought on tick in 1963 from Crowley's Music Shop in Cork, only the wear evidenced on SRV's Strat compares. "There were people who thought that Rory was chiselling it away each night, but it wasn't the case," recalls his brother Dónal. "Rory's sweat was so acidic that it was like paint stripper. After a three-hour set, it was always covered with sweat and you could just see the paint starting to bubble up. Rory was very concerned about it, it felt like premature balding!"

The sweat was such a problem that in the late 70s, Rory started getting tuning problems with the neck. He took it to Fender, who discovered that a mix of the huge amount of moisture in it and the heat of the lights wasn't allowing the wood to settle. Fender made Rory a replica neck and he put the original in his house in London, as little more than an ornament. Several years later, Rory was putting a guitar together and as an experiment, tried the old neck again, which had by then dried out and gone back to its original form. "It was quickly repatriated," says Donal.

For Rory, the '61 Strat was irreplaceable. "It's kind of a lucky charm," he said, "the guitar is a part of me. BB King might have several Lucilles, but I've only got the one Strat. I don't even call it a woman's name. It's what it is. I still play it every day, I just love playing it."

1. Only the middle pickup is original and the tone control has been modded to work on the bridge pickup. The Sunburst finish is barely visible and there is heavy pick wear on the body. The 'Fender Stratocaster' decal has almost completely worn away and the tuning pegs are a mixture of Sperzels and Gotohs. When asked about his Strat, Rory said: "It was the first one I ever saw. It's a '61 model and it has a very flat kind of neck. Although they made the bodies out of alder and ash, mine is actually maple – which is really a one-off!"

2. Rory's AC30 was acquired during his showband days. The Dallas Rangemaster treble boost added bite to the tone. Rory created his searing tone by driving the amp hard the guitar's tone and volume to control everything. By around 1973/74, the Vox AC30 wasn't gelling as he wanted with the sound of the new solo band line-up, so he began to use a variety of Fender amps alongside the Vox, phasing out the Rangemaster from his rig around the same time, although he did go on to use a Hawk treble boost in its place.

RANGEMASTER
TREBLE BOOSTER
BOOST
GUITAR
VOX
VOX
A.C. 30 TOP BOOST

1

2

VOLUME
TONE
TONE

THE BLACK STRAT

In anticipation of the release of Pink Floyd's 2014 album, 'The Endless River', Guitarist was taken on a tour of David Gilmour's gear – including the Black Strat that became his most iconic instrument. In this feature, originally published before Gilmour sold the guitar at auction for a record sum in 2019, we explore its storied life and many mods

At David Gilmour's Medina Studio near Brighton, Phil Taylor, his guitar tech, takes us through his studio setup. Medina is smaller than you may expect for a musician of Gilmour's legendary status, but size isn't everything: Medina is bespoke to Gilmour's needs.

We start our studio tour with what is unarguably David Gilmour's most celebrated guitar – which is something of a 'mongrel'. He bought the Fender from Manny's Music store in New York in May 1970 during Pink Floyd's USA tour. Gilmour had, just weeks earlier, bought his first black Fender Strat at Manny's, but it was soon stolen, along with much of Floyd's rig. Floyd cancelled their remaining US dates, but David again visited Manny's and bought this before returning to the UK.

The Black Strat was first played by Gilmour at the Bath Festival in June 1970. Serendipitously, Phil attended the show as a punter – four years before he began tech'ing for Floyd. Gilmour replaced a lot of his older Fenders in the 80s with Fender's then-new 1957 reissues, and the Black Strat was on display at the Dallas and Miami Hard Rock Cafes until 1997, after which Gilmour played it for Floyd's 2005 *Live 8* show. It remains his most iconic instrument.

HARD KNOCK CAFE

As mentioned, the Black Strat hasn't remained by David Gilmour's side continuously. Phil Taylor explains that it was a switch of vibrato system that prompted the guitar's temporary fall from favour. "When we put the Kahler on, it seemed to deaden the sound somewhat. It just fell out of David's favour when the new '57 reissue Strats came out. So David agreed to loan the Black Strat to the Hard Rock Cafe.

"We were on tour with Pink Floyd, '87 or '88, and went into Dallas Hard Rock Cafe and saw it on the wall. [Editor's note for Black Strat spotters: it was later displayed in Miami's Hard Rock Cafe.] In time, we asked for it back.

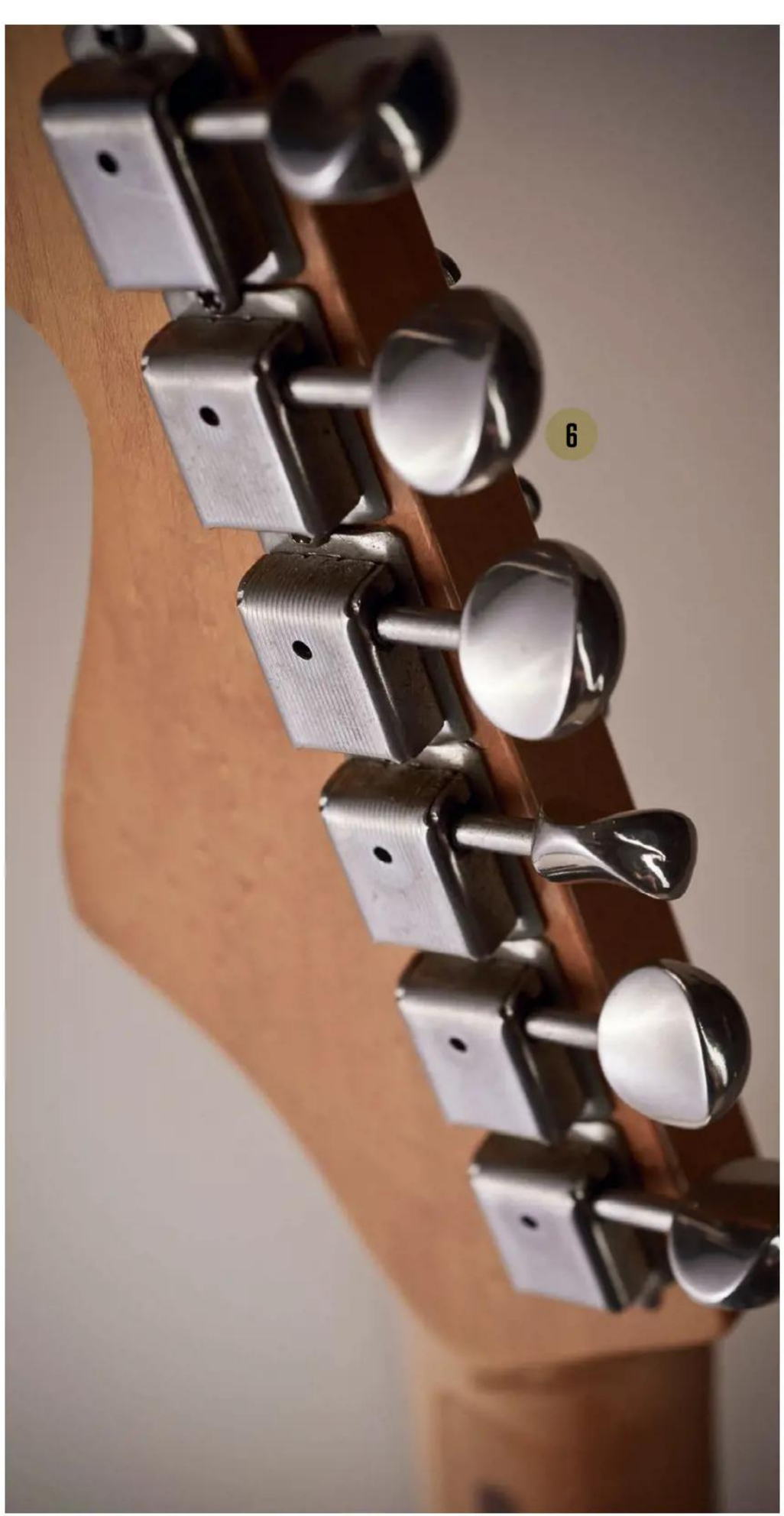
"I called the Hard Rock head of memorabilia, but they said, 'But we own it now.' No, you don't! I had all the paperwork that said it was a loan.

"So we eventually got it back. But it came back with the *Animals* tour-case missing, the knobs gone, and filthy. But I put it all back together and put it in the studio." Would David play it? He was used to the Red Strats by then. "David didn't use the Black Strat again until I suggested he try it at the *Live 8* rehearsals. 'Oh, alright!' David says. But when he started playing it again... we suddenly went from that EMG sound to the single coils. That was it. He was back to the Black Strat."

MOD SQUAD

As a close-up examination of the original black Strat attests, it is a much-modded guitar. It was originally a Fender 1968 to ’69 alder body with black painted over the original Sunburst. It had a Fender late-60s maple neck (large headstock) and 21 frets, but a rosewood-necked version features on *The Dark Side Of The Moon* and *Wish You Were Here*.

To muddy the waters still further, it later had a Charvel neck fitted! When it came back from Hard Rock Cafe, it was damaged and with knobs missing, so the mods have continued. In terms of prior discography, this guitar features on some huge tracks, including *Money*, *Shine On You Crazy Diamond*, *Comfortably Numb* and many other Floyd classics. See it in the concert film *Live At Pompeii* when it was ‘new’ for Gilmour, with a white scratchplate.



1 Examining the guitar, you can clearly see evidence of old routing work, which has since been filled in for the once-fitted Kahler vibrato

2 In the 70s, Gilmour fitted an edge-mounted XLR socket to send the signal to a fuzzbox then back to the guitar – also since removed and filled in

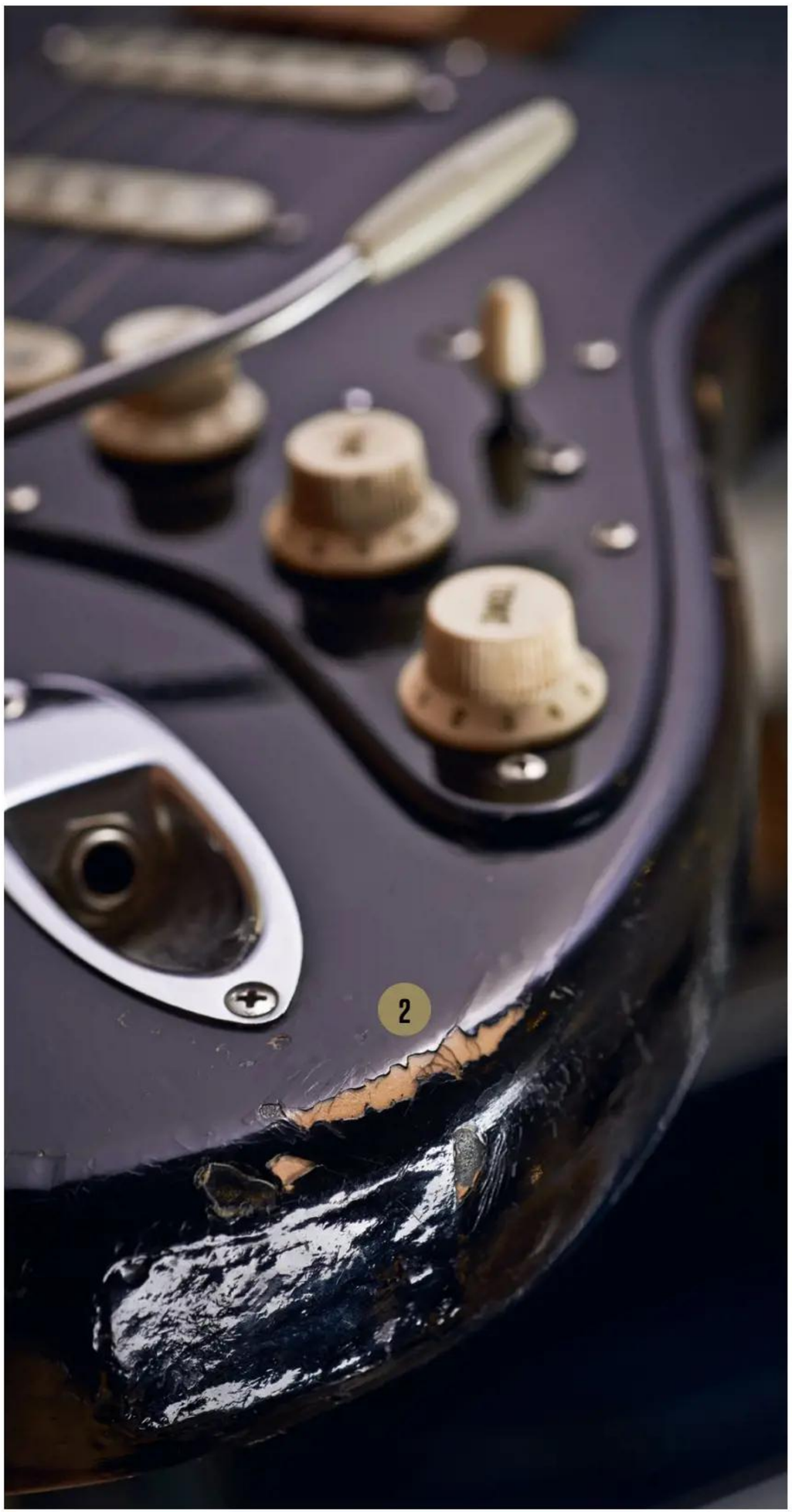
3 The black scratchplate was added in 1974 and was custom-made, as Fender didn't then make them. The five-way pickup selector (replacing the original three-way) arrived in 1985. The mini-toggle just below the pots allows independent switching-in of the neck pickup "for a more Jazzmaster-like tone"

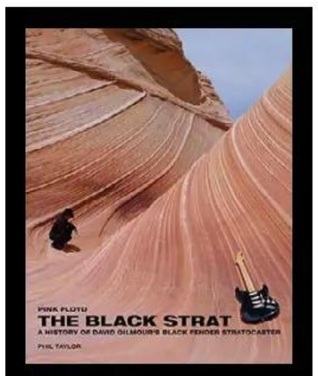
4 The neck and middle pickups are dated 1971 – while the whole pickguard assembly comes from a '71 'bullet truss rod' Fender Strat in 1973. Meanwhile, the bridge pickup is a Seymour Duncan custom-wound SSL-1C, installed in 1979. It replaced a DiMarzio FS-1

5 After the tonal properties of a Kahler vibrato fitted to the Black Strat were found wanting, the original three-spring vibrato was fitted to the guitar

6 The neck is a 1983 '57 reissue C-shape (from one of DG's cream Strats) with 7.25-inch radius fingerboard and 21 vintage-style frets. Tuning is handled by Fender/Gotoh vintage-style tuners

7 Note the shortened vibrato arm, measuring 4.25 inches. "Fender make these short arms now, but I originally just hacked the ends off. The arms are screwed in tight so it never 'flops'. David likes to have the end of the tip in the crease of his palm. He doesn't seem to plan whether he plays finger vibrato or arm vibrato, or a combination of the two, but with a longer arm, he may have to play closer to the neck. That would be more of a separate action to David. This is more 'integrated'... He doesn't often play electric guitars without a trem"





Phil Taylor has been David Gilmour's guitar technician since 1974. His definitive book, *The Black Strat*, is now in its fourth updated edition. www.theblackstrat.com

CLAPTON'S 'BLACKIE' STRATOCASTER

Back in 2006, the Fender Custom Shop recreated Eric Clapton's most famous guitar with painstaking accuracy for a limited run. Here's the story of the original instrument, and how Fender went about recreating it...

PHOTOGRAPHY MATTHEW WORDEN

Eddie Van Halen's Frankenstein, Billy Gibbons' Pearly Gates, Brian May's Red Special... a pet name certainly helps if you want your unique guitar to exude a special aura. And there are no more mojo-laden axes than Eric Clapton's Blackie. Partly because this is no off-the-shelf old Strat.

Back in 1970, Clapton was a member of short-lived supergroup Blind Faith, and mostly playing Gibsons – Les Pauls, ES-335s, SGs and Firebirds. However, impressed by bandmate Steve Winwood's performance with a Stratocaster, Clapton visited Nashville's small Sho-Bud guitar shop mid-tour in 1970, in search of new wood to fire his muse. Once there, he found a rack of six secondhand Fender Strats and bought the lot for a bargain $100 each. Three were given to close friends – Winwood, George Harrison and Pete Townshend – while the other three were dismantled to build a hybrid.

Clapton began by selecting a '56 alder body, finished in black nitrocellulose lacquer. The neck came from a '57, one-piece maple with a hard 'V' contour he loved, while pickups and hardware from the three source guitars were selected and fitted. Blackie was born – it was a mongrel guitar for a pedigree player.

It was EC's main guitar from 1973 to the mid-80s. He debuted it at the Rainbow Concert of '73. It was used to record *Cocaine*, *Wonderful Tonight*, *I Shot The Sheriff* and *Lay Down Sally* among other hits. It's there on the cover of his 1977 album, *Slowhand*. He played it at 1985's *Live Aid*. It was eventually retired from work in 1987 – replaced by Fender's Eric Clapton Signature model, which was ergonomically based on Blackie itself. Clapton brought Blackie out of its retirement for one song in 1991 at the Royal Albert Hall, but the real news happened when he held the second of his Crossroads charity guitar auctions, in June 2004. Many were astonished he'd even offer the guitar for sale. Eyebrows raised further when Blackie was bought by US retailers Guitar Center for a staggering $959,500, entering the record books as the most expensive guitar ever to have been sold at auction.

Fast forward to 2006, and the Fender Custom Shop built a very limited run of exact Blackie Tribute models, which hit a very few select dealers that November. Every detail was diligently replicated, from the worn-to-the-wood body, to the weathered neck, to the unmistakeable cigarette burns on the headstock. Of course, they were only 'available' if you had a huge amount of cash (UK RRP was £13,879!), and if you were lucky (just 60 left the USA).

But if nothing else, these Blackie Tribute guitars were a triumph of cloning a legendary rock artefact. Clapton has twanged his approval of the Tributes: he played what looked like Blackie on three songs at his Royal Albert Hall gig in 2006, but it was in fact the prototype of this homage.

When they visited the UK, the Fender Custom Shop's Mike Eldred and Todd Krause exclusively told *Guitarist* how they recreated an icon...

What access did Fender have?

MIKE ELDRED: "We've spec'd the guitar twice. Todd had access before any other builder. The original Blackie's in good shape. It's all been properly shielded on the inside. The wiring has been tidied up a little bit since the last time we'd seen it. There was shielding tape on the inside and Electrodag conductive paint. But the guitar was still very playable."

TODD KRAUSE: "It was well maintained. Lee Dickson [Eric's guitar tech] didn't hesitate about taking out a rusted pickguard screw and replacing it with a new one. The pickups have been rewired. The saddles on the bridge have been switched. Springs and screws that were too rusty to adjust have been replaced with new ones. Lee has probably dressed the frets several times. The neck refin was professional, though there's not much paint [lacquer] left! It was treated as a tool but wasn't neglected, it was cleaned and kept right."

You say the neck has been shaped by Eric's hand: is the wear so considerable that it's actually changed the shape a little?

ME: "I think it has, because he played that guitar so much and the amount of wear, certainly around the edges on the fretboard... That happens from playing the crap out of the guitar. That's what we mean."

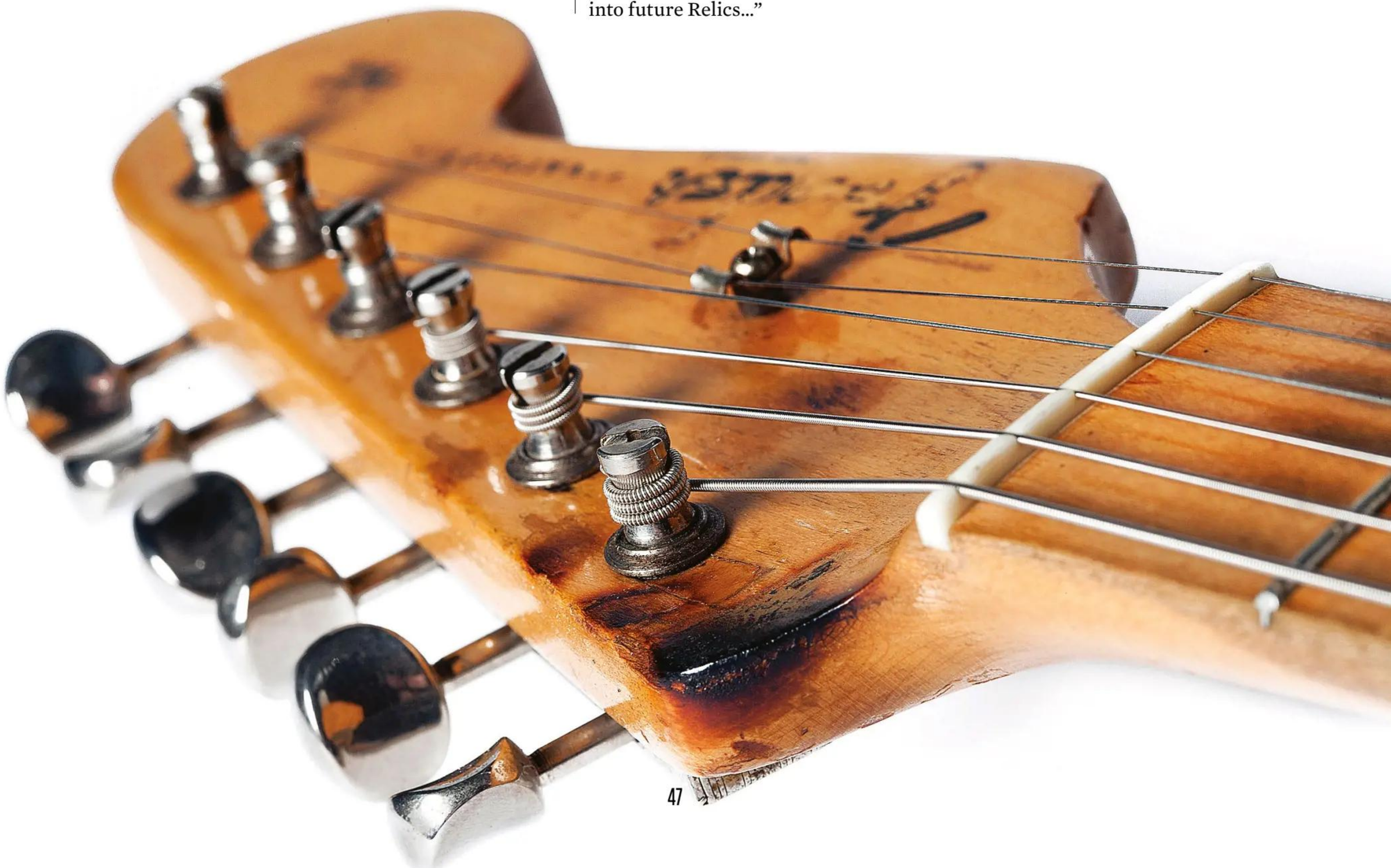
Is there anything unusual about Blackie?

TK: "Yes, and the thing about each Tribute model that we do is that there are always new techniques for ageing that we have to come up with. I had to come up with some new techniques as well as pull from our tried-and-tested methods. For example, the wear on Blackie's fingerboard: we've done necks with divets all over the fingerboard, some a lot, but as far as I know we've never done a neck where there's more finish off than on. Because the neck had been reworked and refinished, when you sand lacquer off, or when it wears off, sweat gets under the paint and it greys the wood. That's something we reproduce when we do a Relic neck. But this had been refinished so this was under the finish. When you take a piece of wood like that to refinish it, you sand it up clean, but the sweat has soaked into the grain and it leaves these little dark whiskers with the finish over it. We had to finish a neck, then un-finish it, then refinish it, then wear it out! There was trial and error involved, but I think it's pretty spot on."

ME: "When we do the replication process on a Tribute guitar, part of the job is to be a detective. How did the guitar get like this? Why is there dirt under the lacquer? Todd had to reverse-engineer what it had been through in the refinishing process, as the body had been refinished, too."

TK: "Blackie will be an inspiration on our future Relics. Now I have new techniques that I can put into future Relics..."

The shots in this feature are of Clapton's original. See www.fender.com for more on the creation of the Custom Shop Tribute model



Fender
STRATOCASTER
"NOW, COME
ASS
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BROOM'S
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STEVIE RAY VAUGHAN'S 'LENNY'

This CBS-era Stratocaster was a favourite squeeze of Stevie Ray Vaughan, and he used it for his most evocative performances and the recordings of two of his most memorable tunes

This circa-1965 Stratocaster belonged to Stevie Ray Vaughan, and was nicknamed 'Lenny' by him in honour of his wife, Lenora. He turned to it when performing live to play the song *Lenny*, a mesmerising, dream-like, jazz-inflected instrumental with a dynamic clean tone quite in contrast to the full-throttle Texas blues that was his stock-in-trade. The guitarist would often close the set by performing the song sitting on the stage edge, smoking a cigarette contemplatively and conjuring magical, fluid runs and extended chords from his fretboard that were suspended somewhere between Hendrix's *Little Wing* and the flash of Kenny Burrell, two of Stevie Ray's major inspirations.

A circa 1965-model Strat found in a pawn shop in the early 1980s, 'Lenny' was a heavily modded creation. Its sunburst finish had been removed and a dark lacquer applied in its place, a tortoiseshell inlay believed to be a pickguard from an early-1900s mandolin was inlaid in its body, and Stevie replaced its rosewood neck with a maple neck given to him by Billy Gibbons. It was sold at auction at Christie's in 2004 for $623,500; Fender's Custom Shop created a limited run of 235 replicas in 2007.

Master builder Jason Smith with an SRV 'Lenny' Strat

Lenny bookended Stevie Ray's recording career. It was used to record *Lenny* on debut album, *Texas Flood* (1983), and for *Riviera Paradise*, the closing song on his final studio album, *In Step*, in 1989. If you've ever doubted the Stratocaster's powers of expression, we urge you to give both a listen.

THE HITMAKER

With an estimated $2 billion-worth of music having featured his golden-era 1960 Stratocaster, Chic legend Nile Rodgers is the King Midas of pop. Guitarist caught up with him around the time of Daft Punk's mega-hit 'Get Lucky', featuring Rodgers' funky guitar lines, to ask him about his signature Fender

We read that $2 billion-worth of music has flowed through the Hitmaker....

"Yeah, and that was an estimate some time ago, so you add on a couple of years. You gotta realise how much music I play. When you think about it, people know the Chic hits and they know *Get Lucky*, but they don't realise about the film scores, the video games, all that other stuff. You add all that together, it becomes a pretty sizeable number rather quickly.

"So that $2 billion number... I think I heard that three years ago. Maybe even longer. I've been regurgitating that fact for a long time now!"

What would you say makes the Hitmaker such a special Strat?

"It's lighter than any other Strat. Fender bought a shipment of alder around 1957. They paid a really low price for this wood, and it was non-delivery, so all they had to do was go pick it up. But when they got there, they discovered the wood was grown up on a mountain. So they bring it all back to California and they realised wood that's not grown at sea level is dryer and lighter. So they think, 'Okay, let's use this, but we'll never use it again, 'cos it's too expensive.' So my body is alder and my neck is maple."

You've tweeted about designing a signature Fender Strat. How's that going?

"We are doing it as we speak. About three weeks ago, I tried the latest body configuration, and I said, 'Well, guys, it's back to the drawing board – again.' We've been working on it for years. It's gonna sound like the Hitmaker. We've copied it exactly. We had to. That's what we finally had to agree to do, no matter how [much hassle it was]. The guys at Fender are really smart: they know what most people like. I understand that, but I had to convince them that if you really want this guitar, you have to make this guitar."

What pickups are being fitted to the signature?

"Just the [standard] Fender pickups, wound right there at the factory. They've got the outputs exactly the same as the Hitmaker. They just sent me three different pickups. When we put all three of their pickups with my body, one of them sounds identical. The other is close, in a way I like a lot. One of them, forget about it; it doesn't work at all. I think they may have been trying to trick me. They were gonna give me these really cool, hype pickups that everybody likes, but it's like, 'Nah, that ain't it.' I'm not saying it's not a good sound, I'm saying it's not *this* sound."

The limited-edition Custom Shop Nile Rodgers Hitmaker Strat was unveiled at NAMM 2014

Fender
STRATOCASTER

BRIDGING THE GAP

Tone Doctor Simon Law – luthier, guitar repairer and vintage valve amp specialist – takes a stock Mexican-made Fender Jimi Hendrix Strat and pimps its bridge and pickups to demonstrate how you can tweak an off-the-peg guitar to better prepare it for life on the road

When I told a guitar-playing friend that I was going to be writing an article on this guitar, he pointed out, "Hendrix sounded great on any guitar." Well, of course! But lest we forget, the guitars our heroes were playing in the 50s and 60s were the best of the best, particularly Jimi, who was rocking late-60s, big-headstock Strats. Still, with the right tools and guidance, we can get quite a bit extra out of this off-the-shelf Strat.

Our Mexican-made model features a right-handed body and an upside-down left-handed neck. Tonally, it's a little thin in timbre and not hugely resonant; the output is quite low and could be more assertive. Of course, much of this is down to the neck and body wood, but the hardware and, more importantly, the bridge can be changed to one of a higher quality that features a solid steel trem block. I will also be swapping out the pickups and tidying up the wiring...

Before we start, it's always a good idea to note some measurements. First, as we're going to be swapping the bridge, note down all the string heights. Using an accurate ruler, measure the distance between the strings and the top of the 12th fret **[1]** – it will normally be 1.5 to 2mm, depending on personal preference. Second, measure the distance between the strings and the top of the outside polepieces of each pickup. The bridge pickups will normally be a little closer than the neck pickup.

GET TO WORK

Now, it's time to tear it apart! I mean, disassemble... All you need for this whole job is a pair of side cutters, a couple of small screwdrivers and a soldering iron **[2]**. Start by removing all the strings (let's treat the guitar to some nice new ones) and then remove all the small scratchplate screws from around the outside of the plate. Using a soft cloth, carefully turn the plate over to expose the beauty of the wiring... Uh oh: bird's nest! **[3]** This may be a nice-looking guitar with a fine black and shiny finish, but under the cover it could be tidier.

Start by making some notes of where the three white wires from the pickups attach. They attach onto the switch in a particular order, meaning you get the right sound from the right click of the switch, so take a close-up shot with your camera phone. Using a 25- or 30-watt soldering iron, carefully desolder these wires from the switch along with the group of three black wires that make up the negative or ground on the back of the volume pot. Now, you can carefully remove the screws that hold the pickups to the scratchplate. The screws can normally stay in the plate along with the small rubber spacers or springs on the underside.

Carefully fit the pickup covers to your new pickups, making sure to use the right pickup in the right position – they should be marked B, M and N, for bridge, middle and neck. Roughly adjust them to a similar height to your previous ones. Once all three pickups are in place, we can get wiring. This is where we can have some fun – and make it look lovely and tidy, just the way Leo Fender would've liked it. Most vintage-style replacement pickups feature cloth-covered wire and this can be bent into nice right angles and cut to perfect lengths. Starting with the bridge hot/white wire, carefully lay the wire down along the pickup, across the volume pot and to the switch. When cut to length and soldered onto the switch, it should look immaculate, as if it had been done at the factory in the 1950s.

Next, you can move onto the middle pickup. Take the white wire towards the bridge pickup then bend it

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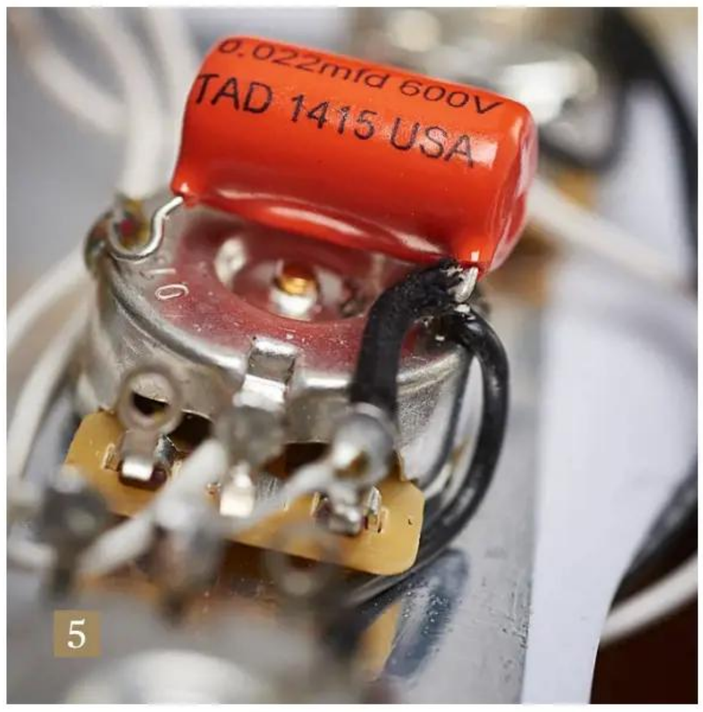

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at right angles down across the bridge pickup and to the switch and solder. Repeat this for the neck pickup, each time taking great care to measure twice before cutting the wire to length. Now, we can group all the black wires together and solder them to the back of the volume pot, once again making sure you have them straight and looking perfect before trimming them to length and soldering. Gone is the pile of spaghetti, replaced with order and correctness! **[4]**

It's time to replace the okay-sounding and rather naff-looking tone capacitor with a lovely sexy-sounding orange one made by Sprague or Tube Amp Doctor (TAD) **[5]**. Of course, tone caps don't do a huge deal when you're not using the tone controls, but cheap ones will bleed too much tone and volume to ground once you do use them. Some Strats are wired so the tone control is out of the circuit when the bridge pickup is on its own. This, in my opinion, is the most useful time to have the tone control in the circuit, because you can reduce the unwanted and shrill high-end down a little by rolling the tone control from 10 down to 8 – thus creating the singing lead Strat tone as used by such players as Jeff Beck, Eric Clapton, Matt Schofield and Eric Johnson.

This can be easily modified by identifying which wire goes from the switch to the back tone control. Then, using a small jumper wire, link the next unused tag on the switch to this wire, or just move this white wire along to the next lug on the switch, giving you a useful tone pot on the bridge pickup. It sounds tricky, but if you look at how the switch is working, you can see where the signal will be routed and work out how to route it differently. Such fun.

Finally, reassemble the scratchplate to the guitar with the tiny screws. You can test the function of the pickups without strings by very gently tapping the polepieces of the pickups with any small non-magnetic screwdriver. Any faults should be easy to recognise and rectify at this point. Next, we can move onto the bridge.

YOUR NEW BRIDGE

In my opinion, steel is the only material that should be used for a vibrato block on your Fender Stratocaster. This has to be pure steel, not steel that has lead or zinc in it. Both of these alloys will kill sustain and dampen clarity. Many companies make replacement hardware for Fender style guitars; my favourite is Callaham from the US and this is what I will be using here.

First, remove the backplate (if fitted) and remove the springs that attach the trem block to the steel trem claw **[6]**. Do this very carefully with long nose pliers (and watch they don't fly straight up

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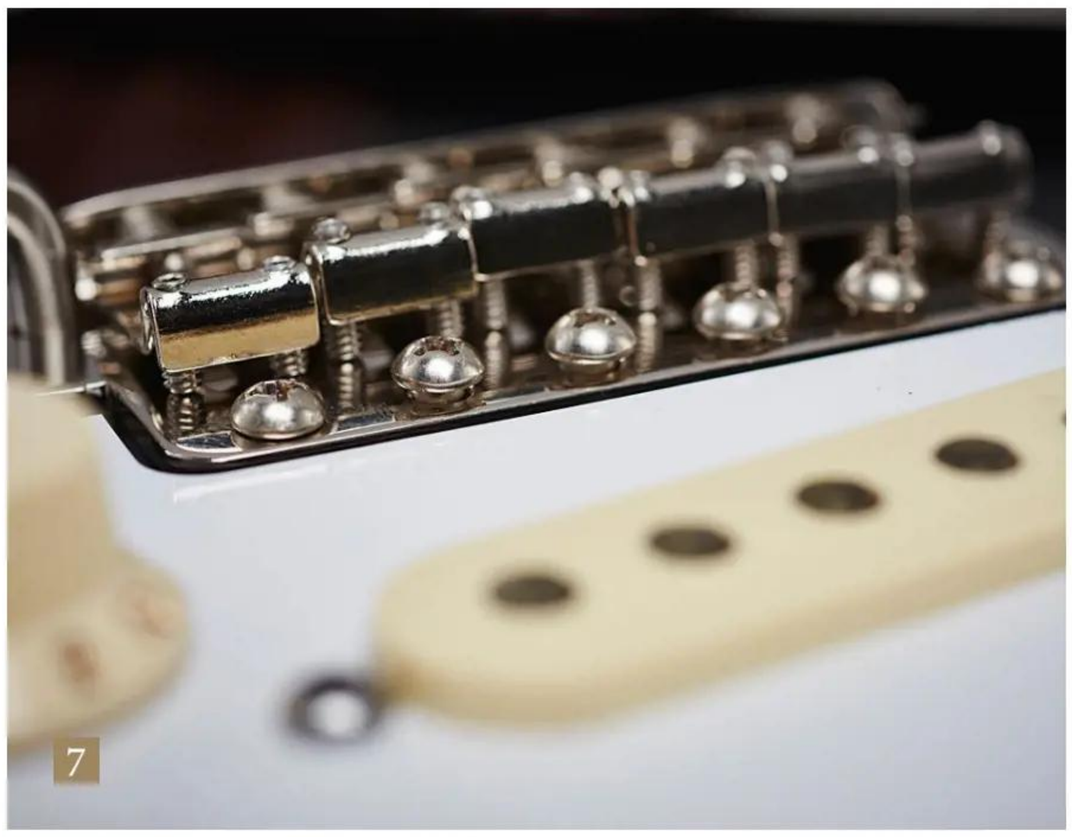
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towards your eyes – I've done it and it isn't nice!). Next, remove the six screws that attach the trem to the top of the guitar. You should now be able to lift the old unit up and out of your guitar. Roughly match the bridge saddles of your new unit to the old one, in both height and back and forth (intonation). Now, to fit the new unit...

Place it in the body rout and line up the six mounting holes. Roughly fit the screws so they're approximately 1mm from the top of the baseplate **[7]**. Flip the guitar over so you can fit the springs. Fit the hook end of the spring into the trem block and then, using a longer bladed flat screwdriver through the hole in the spring, let it slide down onto the trem claw... clonk! **[8]** This can take a few attempts and you may find it easier to use pliers, but it's hugely satisfying to do it this way. Hold the spring in block with one finger, screwdriver into spring hole. Put the screwdriver just behind the trem hook and let the spring slide down the shaft of the driver. Done. Repeat for the other springs.

Next, back to the trem mounting screws... I like to adjust the outer two screws of the six to be just touching the trem baseplate – and I mean just touching so as not to hinder the settlement of the bridge at all. I then set the centre four screws to be just above the baseplate by about 0.5mm. With this adjustment, none of the screws are hindering the trem sustain at all.

Now, you can restring the guitar and make any adjustments to return the instrument to the starting specification, which, of course, should be a bit easier due to the better-quality bridge unit **[9]**. I prefer the trem to be adjusted flat to the body, but with not so much tension on the springs that I can't just wobble a chord or note a little. Some players like a fully floating trem set so that a backward bend of the bar raises the note by a whole tone or even more.

Once you've tweaked, experimented with and checked the intonation, and you've adjusted the pickups for both output and balance from string to string, it's time to check out your guitar in all its new sonic glory. You should have a guitar with more power, sustain, clarity and overall quality of tone – certainly a guitar worth playing. Plus, the new pickups should improve both tone and touch sensitivity. In this feature I fitted some pickups made by the UK manufacturer Rog B pickups, but let your own ears and fingers be the judges. US makers such as Jerry Amalfitano, Lindy Fralin, Seymour Duncan and Ron Ellis – not to mention UK guys such as Mark Foley of Fat Boy Guitars and Tim Mills from Bare Knuckle – all make staggeringly great-quality pickups for both Fender and Gibson guitars.

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70TH ANNIVERSARY

70TH ANNIVERSARY

60..... **The Strat At Seventy**
62..... **The Soul Of A Strat**
68..... **Strat's Life**
82..... **Project Makeover**
86..... **Form, Function, Finesse**

This 1960-spec Custom Shop Stratocaster – belonging to former *Guitarist* Editor Neville Marten – captures the essence of what must have seemed viscerally astonishing at the close of the 1950s. Bold colour, electrifyingly exciting sounds and a shape straight from dreamland

THE STRAT AT SEVENTY

As Leo Fender's greatest creation celebrates entering its eighth decade, we gather a remarkable group of artists and experts to assess its 70-year impact on the landscape of guitar music – kicking off with shadows pioneer Hank Marvin. We also ask Fender's Master Builders what separates a good Strat from a great one and review the new anniversary model Fender has built to mark the big occasion...

WORDS JAMIE DICKSON PHOTOGRAPHY PHIL BARKER

Imagine you are musician walking past a shop window in 1954. You stroll past, take a glance... and then stop dead in your tracks. Behind the glass is what seems to be a rocket ship, its sunburst finish glowing like polished amber. The guitars around it seem bulky and cumbersome by comparison – even that upstart solidbody, the Telecaster, you first clapped eyes on a few years before, now seems like a tractor parked beside a Cadillac...

In 1954 there was no guitar like the Strat. More remarkable still, in the seven decades since, no other new guitar has had such a transformative effect on the guitar scene. Today, a Strat looks as familiar as a tree or a drinking glass. But 70 years ago, it had no real precedent. The shock of that arrival must have been all the greater in post-war Britain. Rationing was still in effect the year the Strat launched and a ban on imported goods from America, which included electric guitars, would remain in place until June 1959. Little wonder, then, that guest editor Hank Marvin describes his first experience of a real Strat as being akin to an encounter with "a guitar from Mars". To read the full account head to page 68.

In many ways, the Strat retained its power to astonish, to revolutionise. Just six years after Hank got his first Strat and made sweet, melodious musical history with it, Bob Dylan outraged a traditionalist crowd at the Newport Folk Festival by 'going electric' armed with a Strat, revolutionising popular music in America, at a stroke. Then, only 10 years after Hank's first encounter with Fender's most famous creation, Hendrix used a Strat to stir a magma-hot cauldron of sound into life when he played his epochal version of *The Star-Spangled Banner* at the muddy finale of the Woodstock Festival. Here, he delivered that historic event's most powerful moment as its unprecedented crowds ebbed away in the grey morning light.

At all times, the Strat has seemed to have the capacity to astonish built into it. In the following pages we pay tribute to its enduring power, in company with dozens of influential artists who have made music history of their own with a Strat. We also receive insights from luthiers who know the instrument inside out – Fender Master Builders Paul Waller and Austin MacNutt – and review the latest Anniversary Strat to join the fold. So join us as we wish happy birthday to an electric icon...

Thanks to Fender, Chris Turpin and Vintage 'n' Rare Guitars in Bath

This original 1956 Strat is an early alder-bodied example from around the time Fender transitioned away from ash – but Master Builders Paul Waller and Austin MacNutt personally prefer the more striking looks of ash

THE SOUL OF A STRAT

What makes one Strat ordinary and another out of this world? It's a question players have pondered for the last seven decades – and who better to explain than Master Builders Paul Waller and Austin MacNutt of Fender's Custom Shop. We join them to talk vintage tone, miracle mods and sanding – lots of sanding…

WORDS JAMIE DICKSON PHOTOGRAPHY PHIL BARKER

Which is the greatest era of Strat in your personal opinion?
Paul Waller: "For me, it's early 60s. I think that's when the Strat really started to come into its own. Putting the rosewood on there, slimming out the neck, and the pickups started getting dialled in to really make what pure Strat sounds are for me."
Austin MacNutt: "I like the late-50s Strats – just the classic look. They all look great, but I feel like they really got it right, right out of the gate."

What do you regard as an ideal weight for a Strat?
Paul: "I personally like just under 8lb – maybe 7¾lb."
Austin: "Yeah, that's a good range. I'm not terribly picky about it, honestly. I've got Strats all over the weight spectrum [in my personal collection] and I don't tend to go for one more than the other because of the weight – it doesn't affect my choice as much as [it might for] some people."

What's your favourite body wood for a Strat?
Austin: "I have go to with ash. I love the look of it, especially if you can get a nice, lightweight piece. And they're out there. I like seeing the grain – it's a little more interesting than an alder body, speaking personally."
Paul: "Yeah, I really like ash-body Strats and it's a dirty little secret that, because I like the 60s neck, when I get a customer that orders an ash-body 60s, I'm like, 'My dude!' [laughs]"

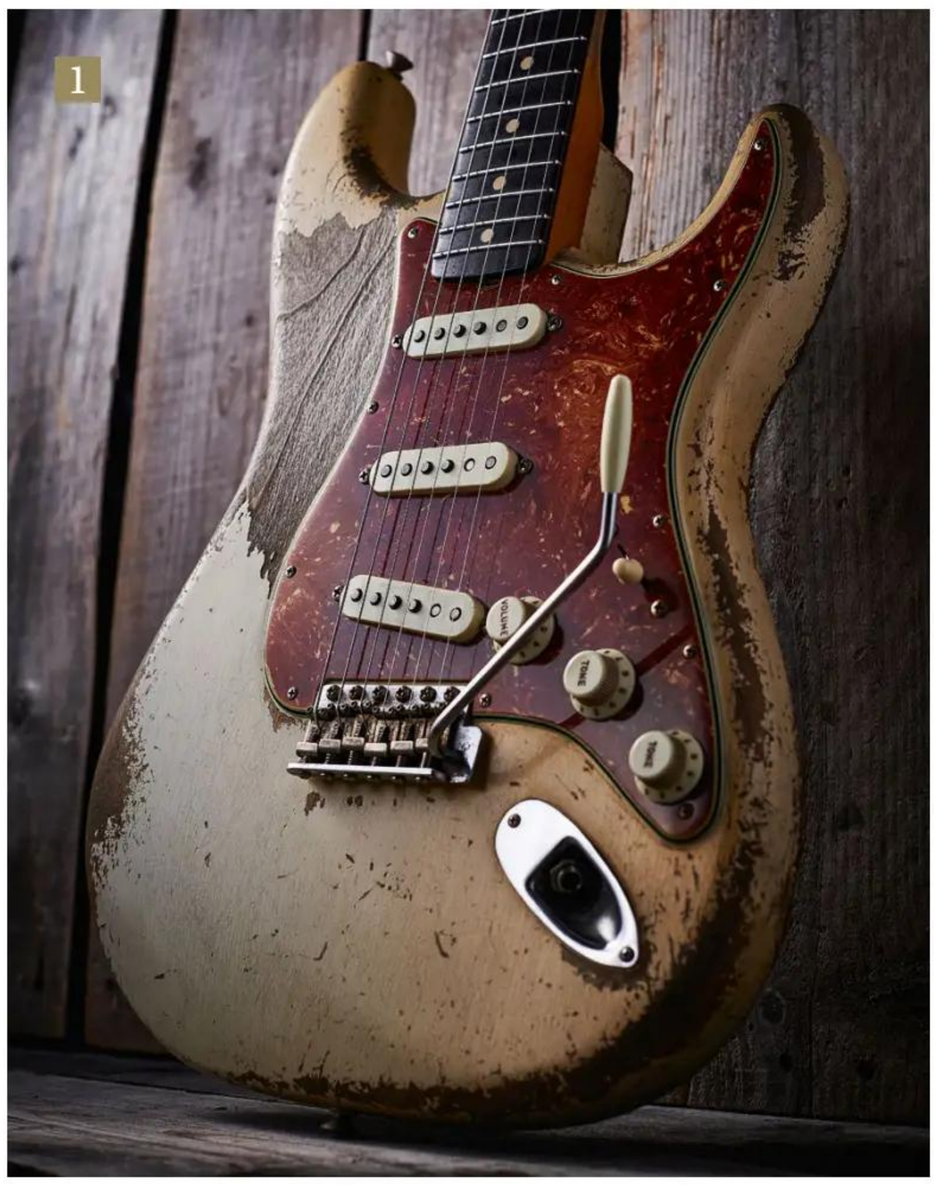
What are your favourite pickups for Strats?
Paul: "It's tough."
Austin: "That is tough."
Paul: "Do you want to go first?"
Austin: "I feel like it's a revolving door... I mean, I just finished one that had Ancho Poblanos in it and I was just playing it and I was like, 'Wow, this sounds really good.'
Paul: "I almost feel like certain pickups might sound better in certain combinations, but, yeah, it definitely

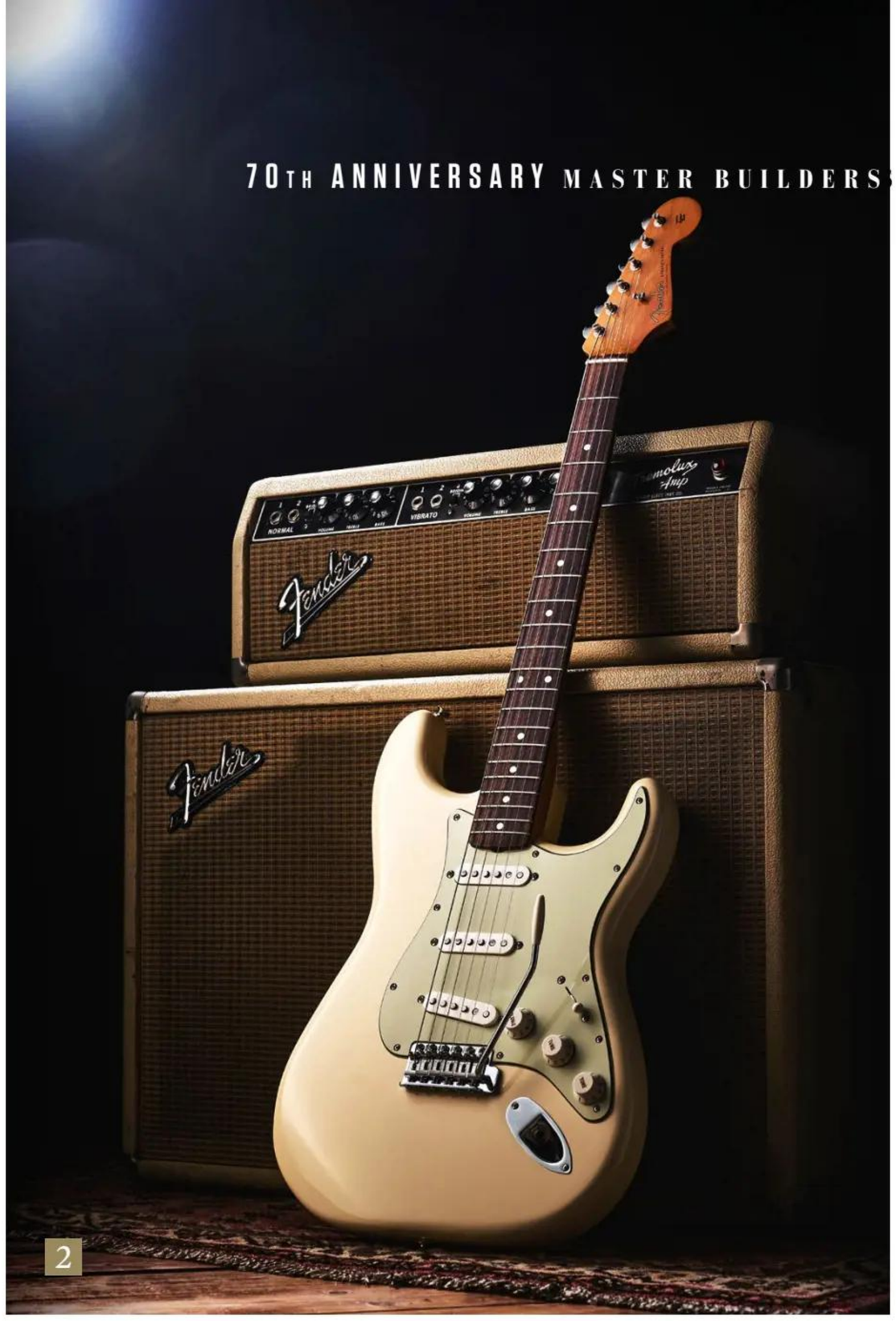
PHOTO BY RYAN PIORKOWSKI (FMIC)

This refinished (but otherwise original) 1961 Strat embodies what Paul Waller calls the period when "the Strat started to come into its own... and the pickups started getting dialled in"

1. This Fender Custom Shop Heavy Relic 1962 Stratocaster was made by Master Builder Dale Wilson and shows how adept the Custom Shop is at relicing guitars

2. On the mass-production side of things, Fender's Vintera II 60s Strat offers surprisingly authentic vintage tones. Pickups remain a key area where makers can dial in sonic character to suit a particular era





moves around for me. I've designed sets of pickups that we have here and I've put a lot of those sets in guitars, and they tend to be on the lower-output side, more like a vintage [set]. But, then, I also really like '69s, anything with enamel [wire]. The set I designed actually has one enamel in it, in the neck, so you can get that really fat 'Jimi' stuff with it, but then I also like the '62s as well. So that was my way of getting the best of both worlds: having a '62 set in the bridge and middle, and an enamel '69 in the neck. That was a fun set to do. I get a lot of orders for those.

"But it's so hard to say what's best because they're all so good. Especially when you have access to the winders that are making the premium stuff. Pickups are also easily altered by adding copper or taking copper away, mixing magnets... It's quite a soup recipe with a lot of ingredients that can be changed very easily."

A lot of players want Strats with quarter-sawn maple necks. What benefits does a quarter-sawn neck bring, in lutherie terms?

Paul: "One of the guys here took a piece of maple and cut it into a 1x1-inch cube and we made sure it was dimensionally the same in both grain directions with a calliper. Then we put it in a press and measured the deflection from point A to point B – you know, the deflection in the middle [when both ends were subjected to a high-pressure load] – and it was the same in both flat-sawn and quarter-sawn. So that really spoke to how maple is one of those materials where it's already really strong, even without the grain orientation. So I would say 'stability' is a word that people should be using, not 'strength' when it comes to grain orientation. A [quarter-sawn maple neck] is going to be a more stable neck, probably, but not necessarily any stronger."

"Pickups are easily altered by adding copper or taking copper away, mixing magnets... It's quite a soup recipe" PAUL WALLER

What are your thoughts on using roasted or torrified maple in Strat necks?

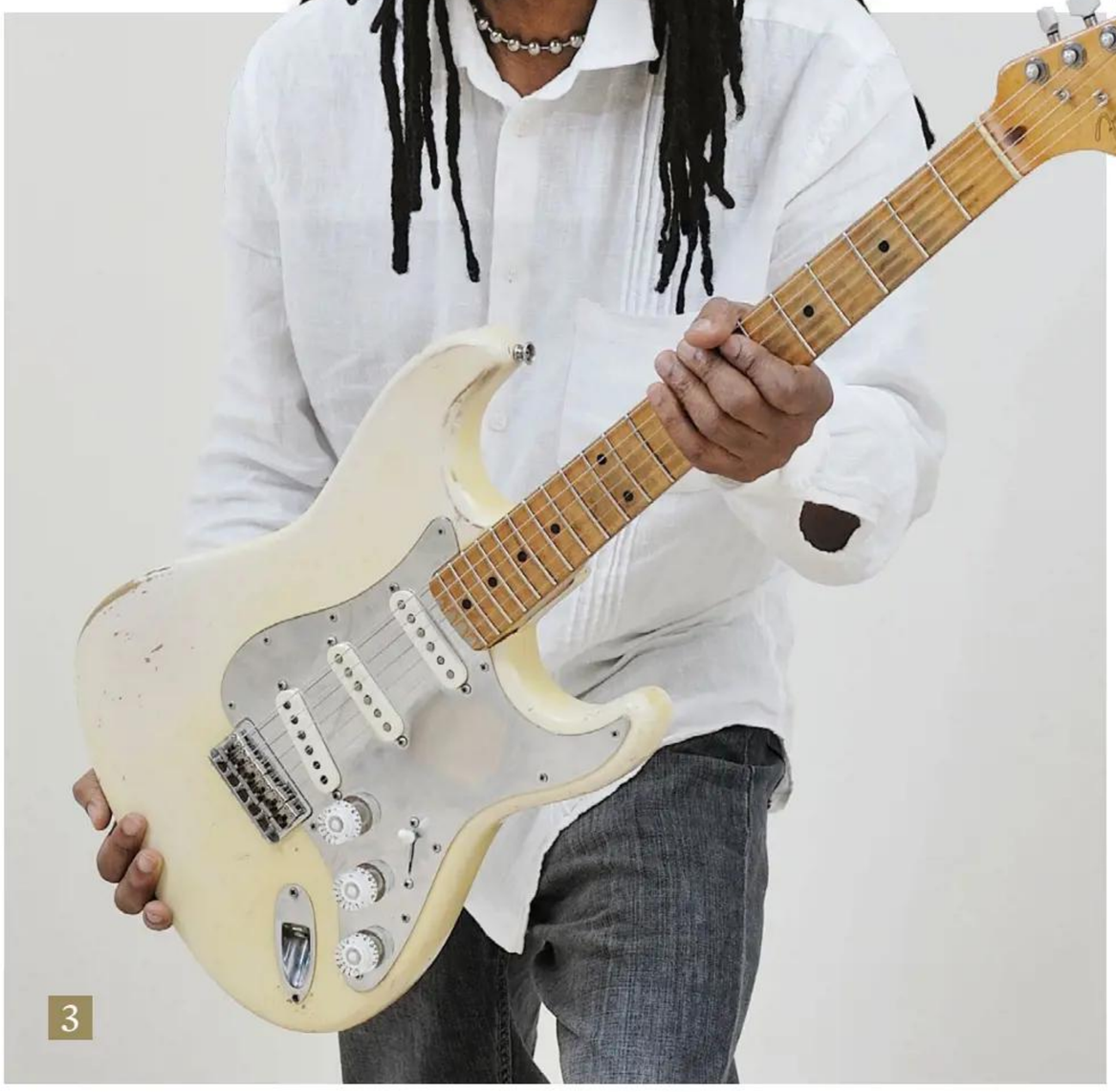
Austin: "I like it. It has a nice look. It oils up well if you're going down that route of an oiled neck; it feels great."

Paul: "I like it, too – I would say the light-roasted version, though. Anything beyond that starts to get too brittle for me and you can get other issues with cracking, and I would be concerned about the longevity of the instrument. I mean, Fenders are designed and built to last forever, so material is an important aspect of that. Anything beyond a light roast I'm not going to be interested in. That has to do with experience of having issues with the darker roasted pieces."

Tell us a really cool setup tip or maintenance tip for Strats.

Paul: "Just leave the bridge alone. The traditional Fender [Strat bridge setup] is the floating bridge. And that's fine if you're using the bar all the time. But, after speaking with a lot of guys, they're not really hammering on the bar. Maybe it's for a specific song or something... but not too many live in that world all the time. And so now I set up Strats where the bridge is actually sitting on the face of the guitar. That way, it'll always come back to pitch and you don't have to worry about putting your thumb on it and changing its pitch. Then, if you decide you want to

This 1966 Strat, refinished by renowned British specialist Clive Brown in Firemist Silver, is set up with the bridge flat against the body. According to Paul Waller, this is the most practical arrangement for most players



"For the few that want the floating bridge, you can float your bridge, but you're just asking for trouble" PAUL WALLER

use the bar, you can put the bar in and dive it, which would satisfy most people.

"For the few that want the floating bridge, you can float your bridge, but you're just asking for trouble at that point. That's why things like Floyd Rose exist, because of floating bridges, and the type of music that came out of that era. That was a problem that needed to be solved and so [the Floyd Rose] came about. But, now, with today's music, that's not really necessary so much. Running with the trends of how guitar players are playing today, that's how I set mine up and I would suggest anybody do it that way."

Some players believe that hardtail Strats have something extra-special about them. What are your thoughts on that?

Austin: "They have a different feel, for sure. I like them."

Paul: "I do, too. I've always liked them because I've always been into Teles, so it was an easy segue for me to do a hardtail Strat. But I would say that they're a bit more hit and miss than a standard Strat. Hardtails are more like Teles, where there tends to be a bit more variance and good ones and bad ones. But when you get a good one it's like, 'Oh boy, what have I been missing?' They can be special, for sure."

What are your personal favourite electronics mods for Strats?

Austin: "I like having the 'blender' in it, so you have [three knobs that control] volume, tone and the blender [allowing bridge-and-neck and all three pickups to be engaged at once]. I think that's incredibly useful."

Paul: "I've been doing that a lot lately, too, especially with a humbucker [in HSS builds], because now you can get the humbucker and the neck [using] the blender. I would say in the last 20 years, that's been one of the greater upgrades for the Strat. Because you really can't fix much on the Strat, but that helped bring in some stuff and now somebody that's maybe playing country can kind of get a Tele thing out of it with the blender."

What's the best Strat you've ever played?

Austin: "I did a refret on a '58 years ago that someone brought me, that one just sounded amazing. Maybe it was just one of the first vintage ones I worked on, but I played that one for a while before I called the owner and had him come pick it up!"

Paul: "That's a tough question. A couple that stick out – Ronnie Wood has a hardtail Strat and that one was incredible, I think it was a '55. And then Nile Rodgers' Hitmaker Strat, that one's incredible."

www.fendercustomshop.com

3. Nile Rodgers with the 1960 Strat that became known as the 'Hitmaker'. He used it to create songs that led to some 500 million record sales – Paul Waller says it's one of the best-sounding Strats he's ever played, too

4. This Custom Shop Strat belongs to Chris Turpin of roots-rock band Ida Mae. It features a control plate patterned after one fitted to a 1954 prototype presented to George Fullerton, then VP of Production

STRAT'S LIFE

More than 30 of the world's top Stratocaster players join us to share their love of Leo's double-cut masterpiece

WORDS ANDREW DALY, JAMIE DICKSON & JASON SIDWELL

HANK MARVIN

What Strat moment on a recording inspires you most?

"Going back to my school years, hearing the intro and solo of The Crickets' *That'll Be The Day* on a jukebox was a revelation, and motivated me to try to copy this 'new to us' American style of rock 'n' roll guitar. As regards my own playing, I thought *The Theme From The Deer Hunter (Cavatina)* was special as it's a beautiful composition written by Stanley Myers, and also my performance was recorded in one take, except for one note where there was an odd distortion. I dropped in and replaced the note.

"A couple of other recordings that I like for different reasons are *Hot Rox*, which I wrote with my son Ben; it was fun for me to go nuts and play an extended blues-rock solo. And also *Ain't No Sunshine* arranged for me by Mark Griffiths, which gave me an opportunity to play a jazzy, blues-influenced solo. Very satisfying."

What's your best tip for getting great tones out of a Stratocaster?

"Because I use the vibrato bar and most of the time have it held in my right hand, I was forced to pick nearer the fingerboard, rather than the bridge. This produces a slightly sweeter tone. I would also not have too much top on the amp. In fact, the early AC30s – it's their 65th anniversary in 2024! – did not have a top boost function and then, when they added it, I discovered that if not used with restraint it would cause Bruce [Welch] to howl in pain – or perhaps he was just singing?"

When did you get your first Strat and what was it?

"From late 1958 to early '59 I was playing an Antoria, which had a neck designed and constructed by Fred Flintstone, who thought he was making a club... To put me out of my misery, Cliff [Richard] bought me my first Strat in spring 1959. It was red with a bird's eye maple neck and fingerboard, and gold-plated hardware. It looked out of this world. A guitar from Mars. It unfortunately had very heavy strings, something like 13 or 14 to 56, impossible to bend a string, other than the second string up a half-step, but I was saved by the vibrato bar, which enabled me to pull the second string up a whole tone. But it had to be set up to enable that. At that time, the only finger vibrato I was aware of was the classical one, which doesn't work too well on heavy steel strings. Wanting to make the guitar 'sing' more, I found using the vibrato bar achieved that. I also used it to dip the pitch and sometimes to give the strings a wild shake as on the intro to The Shadows' hit *Man Of Mystery*. I certainly would not have been able to develop that on any other guitar available in those days."

Rosewood or maple?

"I prefer a bird's eye maple fingerboard. I always thought it looked better. How shallow is that? But importantly I like the feel under my fingers."

Strats look coolest in what finish?

"A red Strat is historically associated with me, although I have had and performed with both white and black Strats."

You've never been a stickler for playing vintage Strats, but do you own any?

"The Strats I've used since 1989 have been my Custom Shop Signature models, which are based on a 1958 red one that I used through the 80s. That '58 is the only vintage Strat I own."

PHOTO BY MIKE MARSLAND/WIREIMAGE/GETTY IMAGES

"Cliff [Richard] bought me my first Strat in 1959. It was red with gold-plated hardware. It looked out of this world"

HANK MARVIN

PHOTO BY BRIAN RASIC/GETTY IMAGES

JENNIFER BATTEN

What amp/pedal combination sounds best with a Strat?

"I'd have to go with my years of playing with Jeff Beck: he was using a Marshall DSL, one of three prototypes before production began. He used a [Pro Co] Rat [2 Distortion] pedal and later a [J Rockett] Archer. His pedal use was always minimal. He got reverb and delay dialled in by the monitor/front-of-house engineers as part of rehearsal so nothing else was clogging his tone. Other pedals would sneak in from time to time, like a Snarling Dogs Wah, flanger for the intro of *Blue Wind*, which was immediately out of the chain after, and a ring modulator on the *You Had It Coming* tour."

What Strat moment on a recording inspires you most?

"Jeff Beck's *Wired* album. The tones that he got out of the guitar were, and continued to be throughout his life, absolutely magnificent."

MARK BOWEN, IDLES

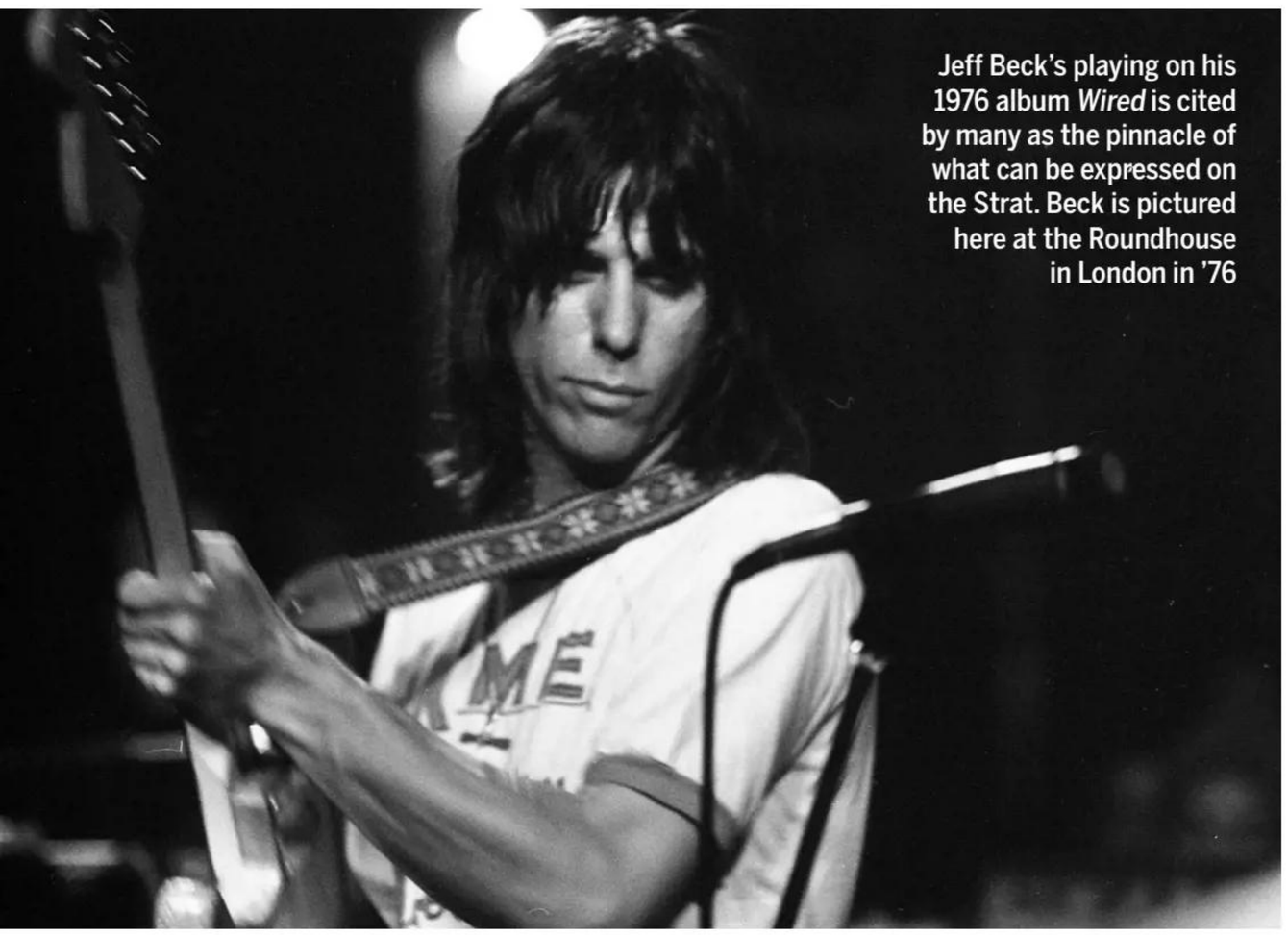
Why do you play a Strat? What does it do for you that other guitars don't?

"It is the quintessential electric guitar. If you ask someone to draw an electric guitar, they will invariably draw a Strat. It feels organic, there are no edges or corners, it moves up and down and back and forth in sync with the expression of your movement. It can twang and it can sizzle. It can cope with big ol' strings. The necks – especially the big thick 70s ones – just feel right to me. You wield a Strat, not just play on it."

Who do you regard as the greatest Strat player of all time?

"There's too many, that's the whole point. Hendrix, SRV, Knopfler, Morello. But the most important for me is my guitar hero, Dick Dale, who changed music with a Strat. He sculpted and carved what guitar music was."

PHOTO BY WATALASANUMA/SHINKO MUSIC/GETTY IMAGES



Jeff Beck's playing on his 1976 album *Wired* is cited by many as the pinnacle of what can be expressed on the Strat. Beck is pictured here at the Roundhouse in London in '76

TYLER BRYANT

Who do you regard as the greatest Strat player of all time?

"I grew up idolising Jeff Beck... He was and will always be the freakiest guitarist to me. If I can figure out how to pull a fraction of the sounds out of my Strat that he pulled out of his, I'll feel like a winner. With a good Strat, the sonic possibilities are endless."

PHOTO BY ALYSSE GAFKJEN

MITCH DALTON

What Strat moment on a recording inspires you most?

"I vividly remember the 'light bulb' moment regarding the Strat. It occurred at a holiday camp in Devon and I must have been eight or nine years old. The jukebox there continuously belted out 60s hits of the day. As I walked past on the first day, the menacing sound of low quaver tom-toms filled the air for four bars, to segue into – BLAMMO! – the guitar intro to *Apache*. The cutting tone, the tremolo arm, the reverb and echo, the minor key... That was that. There was no going back."

PHOTO BY IAN BOICHAT AT ORIGIN PHOTOGRAPHY STUDIOS

When did you get your first Strat and what was it?

"I'd been working in studios for about five minutes when it became deafeningly obvious that I needed a versatile instrument capable of responding to the musical and stylistic demands of any job that might be thrown my way. It had to be a Strat. I trawled through the pages of *Exchange & Mart* and there it was: 1962 pre-CBS item, £150 or nearest offer. I'm told it's worth a shed load of money [today]. All I know for certain is that it sounds great, especially when you do The Shadows walk at the same time."

KIRK FLETCHER

What amp/pedal combination sounds best with a Strat?

"I love making a Strat fatter. I shy away from the [Ibanez] Tube Screamer thing; the pedals I like with the Strat have always been Lovepedal's Tchula [Boost] or the [Vemuram] Jan Ray [Overdrive]. It could also be a clean boost pedal with some really cooking non-master volume Fender amp, like a Super Reverb or Tweed 4x10 Bassman. Or a whole other approach from my gospel days – a loud, clean amp like a [Fender] Twin, Jazz Chorus, or even a Peavey Renown, believe it or not."

What is the greatest tone made with a Strat on a record?

"Firstly, Jimi Hendrix's *Machine Gun*. Secondly, Doyle Bramhall II on his first solo album, self-titled. With the tone on *Stay A While*, he really turned my head around on getting the fattest tone from a Strat. I saw him live in the mid-90s and he had the sparsest gear you could imagine: a reissue [Fender] Bassman, a couple of Strats and a couple of pedals. It sounded incredible! I realised how much tone is in the mind and the hands; the heart and soul, too. Finally, Michael Landau: literally any recording, but how about *Born In The Rain* off *The Star-Spangled Banner* record?"

“I grew up idolising Jeff Beck… He was and will always be the freakiest guitarist to me… With a good Strat, the sonic possibilities are endless”

TYLER BRYANT

PHOTO BY ALYSSE GAFKJEN

Tyler Bryant has had a Strat in his hands since he was a child. “At this point,” he says, “I can’t imagine my life without one”

PHOTO BY TIBBY FLORA

BRETT GARSED

What amp/pedal combination sounds best with a Strat?

"I really like using fuzz tones with mine as it'll fatten up the back pickup. If you can get that kind of sound with pedals it allows a Strat to do what it does naturally, so you can have the best of all worlds tonally."

Who do you regard as the greatest Strat player of all time?

"This is an impossible question to answer, but the first person that came to mind for me was Rory Gallagher."

PHOTO BY NINA WESTERVELT/WWD VIA GETTY IMAGES

GIRL IN RED

Why do you play a Strat? What does it do for you that other guitars don't?

"The Strat was my first ever electric guitar, so, for me, it's the epitome of what the electric guitar is. And now I use it because it's iconic and I love the sound."

Who do you regard as the greatest Strat player of all time?

"The most iconic Strat player will always be Jimi Hendrix. Not only was he a really cool guitarist, but I really connect the imagery and essence of Stratocasters to Jimi Hendrix and the 60s era of art and music."

ALLEN HINDS

What's your best tip for getting great tone from a Strat?

"How many times have I gone into a store, seen a beautiful Strat and when I pick it up, it immediately turns me off due to an improper setup? And by a 'setup' I mean several things: neck pitch, truss rod, fret continuity, each individual saddle's height, pickup height, bridge screw adjustment, intonation. When all this is right, your hands have a much better chance of ultimate expression, feel and tone."

Allen Hinds says that, even more so than for other electrics, a really thorough setup is essential if you want to get the best from a Fender Stratocaster

What is the ultimate Strat there's ever been?

"There are a couple for me. One of the best years was '56: the soft V-shaped neck, super comfy, and that old two-tone lovely nitrocellulose look. A friend has one and it has to be one of the most resonant Strats ever – last of the ash bodies, so the weight is perfect. My next favourite might be a '60 slab-'board for the aesthetic of the finish. The dark, dark oxblood red is different from the later fire-engine reds... and the slab 'board is great. But I think the '64s were the best neck shape: girth without being overly fat."

ERIC JOHNSON

What's your best tip for getting great tone from a Strat?

"One of the things I like to do is to put the tone control on the bridge pickup and roll it off a bit. Also, I put the bridge pickup quite close to the strings to make it a little stronger."

RICHIE KOTZEN

What Strat moment on a recording inspires you most?

"Ritchie Blackmore's intro to the song *Woman From Tokyo* is one of the greatest-sounding rock 'n' roll guitar intros played on a Strat. It is relatively clean with just enough gain to give it power and attitude [and] he sits in time with the drums. This is something a lot of fans take for granted, but it is a very important component in how and why performances 'sound' as they do."

PHOTO BY WILL IRELAND

REBECCA LOVELL, LARKIN POE

What Strat moment on a recording inspires you most?

"[Stevie Ray Vaughan's] *Live At The El Mocambo* is probably one of the most inspirational exhibitions of a Stratocaster from where I sit. Also, we played Doheny Blues Festival in California five or six years ago and watching Jimmie Vaughan play his Strat on stage was like raising hair on the back of the neck. When you see somebody playing with that authority, that is a connective moment where you understand the instrument's power."

What's your best tip for getting great tone out of a Strat?

"It's all in the right hand – and that's coming from someone who started out as an acoustic player. It's taken me a long time to understand the appropriate amount of force to use on a Strat. Because watching a player like Stevie play, you begin to understand how much violence the guitar can actually take [laughs]. You can draw a lot of dynamics out of your instrument if you're willing to muscle in but also lighten up. I've broken thousands of strings on my blessed guitar... poor thing [laughs]."

What amp/pedal combination sounds best with a Strat?

"On a track called *Bad Spell* I used a Fender Deluxe with a Royal Jelly by Beetronics. It's like a really overblown fuzz pedal that gives a kiss of an octave sound to it. It's got a little bit of a slap on it and sounds really sick."

Stevie Ray Vaughan was a force of nature when he played live on the Strat. Pictured here in New York, 1981, his gig at the El Mocambo club in Toronto, two years later, is deemed by many to be his greatest to make it onto a recording

"Stevie Ray Vaughan added sweetness to the Strat tone… His fluency was astonishing and new to the game"

ANA POPOVIĆ

PHOTO BY EBET ROBERTS/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

STEVE LUKATHER

What Strat moment on a recording inspires you the most?

"This is tough to answer. I suppose Jimi was my first 'Wow, I love that sound!' moment. Doesn't hurt if you *are* Jimi... Jeff Beck's *Where Were You*, all of SRV's stuff, David Gilmour... Mike Landau knows how to make a Strat sing. Eric Johnson. Man, it's hard to answer completely."

What's your best tip for getting great tone from a Strat?

"Be a great player [laughs]. A great amp... Marshall and Fender amps come to mind. I suppose a Dumble, but I had a very early 1980 Dumble Overdrive Special I bought for 1,000 bucks. But for *me*, it was hardly a magic amp. Only thing magic was the 2,000 per cent I made when I sold it! It really is the players that use them."

YNGWIE MALMSTEEN

When did you get your first Strat and what was it?

"When I was seven or eight years old, I bought a 'Strat', but it wasn't a Fender; it was a bogus copy. But it was exact, you know? And the first thing I noticed was that I hated the pickups. So I went to the music store and they sold me something called a Fat Strat pickup, which was still a single coil, and it sounded way better.

"That was the one and only thing I found with Strats that I don't like: the pickups. I think they're awful. But that's just me. Because you'll hear Hendrix and you hear all these other guys, and they sound great with them. I mean, my playing style is... different because it's not only the blues, it's more linear and I just play a very different style than most guitar players do. Other than that, man, fuck, the Strat is amazing."

Which is the coolest Strat headstock?

"I like them all. But I always kind of gravitated to a big headstock because it just looks really cool. And secondly, if you don't know this, now you shall: on a solidbody electric guitar, like Telecaster or Stratocaster, the sound resonates not really from the body but from the headstock. If you take the body of the guitar and hold it against the wall, you get nothing. But if you put the headstock against the wall, the whole wall vibrates the sound from the Stratocaster, like from the volume of the guitar. Basically, the resonance is from the headstock. So the bigger headstock would have more volume."

Strats look coolest in what finish?

"I have a hilarious story for you. When I was a kid, I used to do a lot of gigging, and it was not like in America, where you could play in Top 40 bands, you know? I had a band with a real guitar player, believe it or not, and his father was a well-off guy who had his own company. So his father was like, 'You kids can play here every weekend, as long as you play one ABBA song and one Beatles song.' I was 12 or 13 years old and we got paid. One day, somebody filmed the show on one of these [Kodak] Super 8 cameras. I was wearing black and I was playing a black Strat. And what I saw in the picture in the film was... it looked like I was just playing a fucking pickguard. All I saw was the pickguard. I said, 'Fuck it.' I went home, took the guitar apart and painted the guitar white. From then on, I said, 'I need the lighter-coloured guitars.'"

DEWAYNE 'BLACKBYRD' MCKNIGHT, P-FUNK

When did you get your first Strat and what was it?

"While I was in one of my favourite music stores in midtown LA called Grants School Of Music, I looked behind the counter and saw a guitar that looked exactly like a sunburst Strat with a maple neck but no Fender logo on it. I asked Mrs Grant if it was for sale. She said yes; it was $68. I begged my parents to buy it for me to no avail. As my 18th birthday was coming up, my brother offered to buy the guitar for me. I thought it was a copy, but at one point I took the neck off the guitar to find a date: it was 9-58. I showed the guitar to an expert and he confirmed it was a 1958 sunburst Fender Stratocaster. I still have the body of the guitar – and the rest is a horror story, which I won't go into."

What's your best tip for getting great tone from a Strat?

"I've been told that I am a heavy-handed player, so I need the action at a level to compensate for that. I first set my strings to 5/64th-inch off the frets across all the strings, measuring from the bottom of the strings. My favourite tech told me that this is the lowest measurement to get a good tone for the way I play. If my hands and my guitar have a great relationship, gear and anything else is a plus."

TOM MORELLO

Who do you regard as the greatest Strat player of all time?

"Jimi Hendrix, David Gilmour, Jeff Beck, Ritchie Blackmore, Stevie Ray Vaughan, Andy Gill of Gang Of Four and Brother Wayne Kramer of the mighty MC5 have all wielded the Strat in inspirational ways – and my 'Soul Power' Strat allowed me to unlock a new era of sound and fury in Audioslave."

SIMON NEIL

Why do you play a Strat? What does it do for you that other guitars don't?

"I don't think I'd have ever come to write music in the way that I do without the Stratocaster. It's so percussive, so dynamic, it makes you play in a different way. My very first one was gifted to me by my bandmate's dad, and I recorded our first three records on that Stratocaster. It's the most expressive guitar I've ever played – there's a reason I'm still playing it now!"

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ALYSSE GAFKJEN

DeWayne's first experience with buying a Strat resulted in him bagging a bargain: $68 for a '58!

"My brother offered to buy the guitar for my 18th birthday. I thought it was a copy, but at one point I took the neck off the guitar to find a date: it was 9-58"

DEWAYNE 'BLACKBYRD' MCKNIGHT

DEWAYNE 'BLACKBYRD' MCKNIGHT PHOTOS BY PARAS GRIFFIN/GETTY IMAGES

PHOTO BY YOSSI ZWECKER

OZ NOY

Who do you regard as the greatest Strat player of all time?

"Jimi Hendrix: he started it all and opened the doors for everybody. Jeff Beck took the instrument to the next level, pushing the envelope further than anyone so far. Stevie Ray Vaughan took Hendrix, Clapton, Albert King & BB King and made it into his own personal style with the most glorious tone ever imagined. Eric Johnson – the most original rock player since Hendrix and Beck – invented his new vocabulary of blues-rock and beyond."

PHOTO BY JMENTERNATIONAL/GETTY IMAGES

CARLOS O'CONNELL, FONTAINES DC

What amp/pedal combination sounds best with a Strat?

"Best drive would be anything that chokes, anything with good sag in it. Fender Blender is a classic effect that takes the dynamic in a Strat so well. Right now, I'm using a 636P by Soundgas based on the preamp from the old Grampian spring tanks. The choke on it makes the Strat top-end sound so fuzzy and really brings out the low-end that's so perfectly balanced on the Strat, making it feel like the cones in the amp are about to blow up."

Who do you regard as the greatest Strat player of all time?

"The obvious answer is Hendrix. But Frusciante has to be the most exciting and sensitive Strat player in modern music."

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ALYSSE GAFKJEN

ARI O'NEAL

When did you get your first Strat and what was it?

"I got my first Strat when I was in college from a pawn shop. I wanted something that sounded more diverse and versatile, and the Strat does that for me. I have been playing it ever since! There's an undeniable power to it; when I play, there is no fear and I'm transported to a different state of being."

PHOTO BY KEVIN NIXON/CLASSIC ROCK MAGAZINE

JOE PERRY

What Strat moment on a recording inspires you most?

"Anything Jeff Beck did in the last 30 years since he put down his Les Paul and was exclusively a Strat guy. I saw him play at the Boston Tea Party touring behind the first album, and they did a song from their new upcoming album [*Beck-Ola*], and he switched to a Strat for that; it was *Jailhouse Rock*. He used the Strat and the vibrato as part of his vocabulary. He used that [vibrato] in a musical way – way more than anybody else that I've ever heard. Jeff was heads, hands and feet above everybody else when it came to using everything a Strat had to offer."

What amp/pedal combination sounds best with a Strat?

"To start with, I would take an old Klon pedal and put it into a small Fender. Then I would probably put a compressor on it somewhere; I have a Carl Martin [Compressor Limiter], and Universal Audio has a really good one called the 1176 [Studio Compressor]. I would go for that before I go for more overdrive."

In your opinion, which is the coolest Strat headstock?

"I think the bigger one [from the 70s] looks cool. There's no denying that the guitar is a phallic-looking musical instrument. And, you know, to dot the i's and cross the t's, the bigger headstock does it..."

PHOTO BY LELAND HAYWARD

ANA POPOVIĆ

What's your best tip for getting great tone out of a Strat?

"Put the toggle switch in the second or fourth position. Combining the Alnico V pickups with a Fender clean-toned amp, such as Super Reverb or Deluxe Reverb, is as close to the heart and soul of a Fender Strat as you can get, especially if played on a maple-neck Strat."

What Strat moment on a recording inspires you most?

"I'd have to go with *Riviera Paradise by* Stevie Ray Vaughan from the album *Live from Austin, Texas*."

When did you get your first Strat and what was it?

"It was in '96, I believe, at a shop in my hometown of Belgrade, Serbia. I bought a secondhand CBS Strat from 1975 with a natural finish. That got me through the first shows with my first band."

What amp/pedal combination sounds best with a Strat?

"In my opinion, a Mesa/Boogie Mark IV with an original Ibanez Tube Screamer [TS808]. You can even use two for an extra boost! Then add an original Boss Chorus."

Who do you regard as the greatest Strat player of all time?

"Jimi was revolutionary; he changed the accustomed way of playing guitars in the 60s and 70s, and the Strat and Fender were never the same after that. Stevie Ray Vaughan added sweetness to the Strat tone, and that hasn't been heard before or after; Stevie's fluency was astonishing and new to the game. And then Jeff Beck went even further to broaden the musical spectrum; Jeff widened the sound options and modernised the approach on a Strat in the 90s."

Strats look coolest in what finish?

"My favourite is my signature 'Foggy' finish, which is called Foggy Mirror Chrome. When paired with a mirror pickguard, it's a showstopper!"

Though Joe Perry is often associated with the Gibson Les Paul, the Strat has been central to his sound since the early 70s

"Jeff Beck was heads, hands and feet above everybody else when it came to using everything a Strat had to offer"

JOE PERRY

PHOTO BY KEVIN NIXON/CLASSIC ROCK MAGAZINE

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ALYSSE GAFKJEN

REI

When did you get your first Strat and what was it?

"My first memory of playing a Stratocaster was in kindergarten in NYC. It was a Made-In-Japan '62 Stratocaster from 1986 with the iconic three-tone sunburst. The Strat screams 'main character vibes' and also has a wide range of tones to offer, which is great for an artist like me who has all types of genres on one setlist/album."

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ALYSSE GAFKJEN

NILE RODGERS

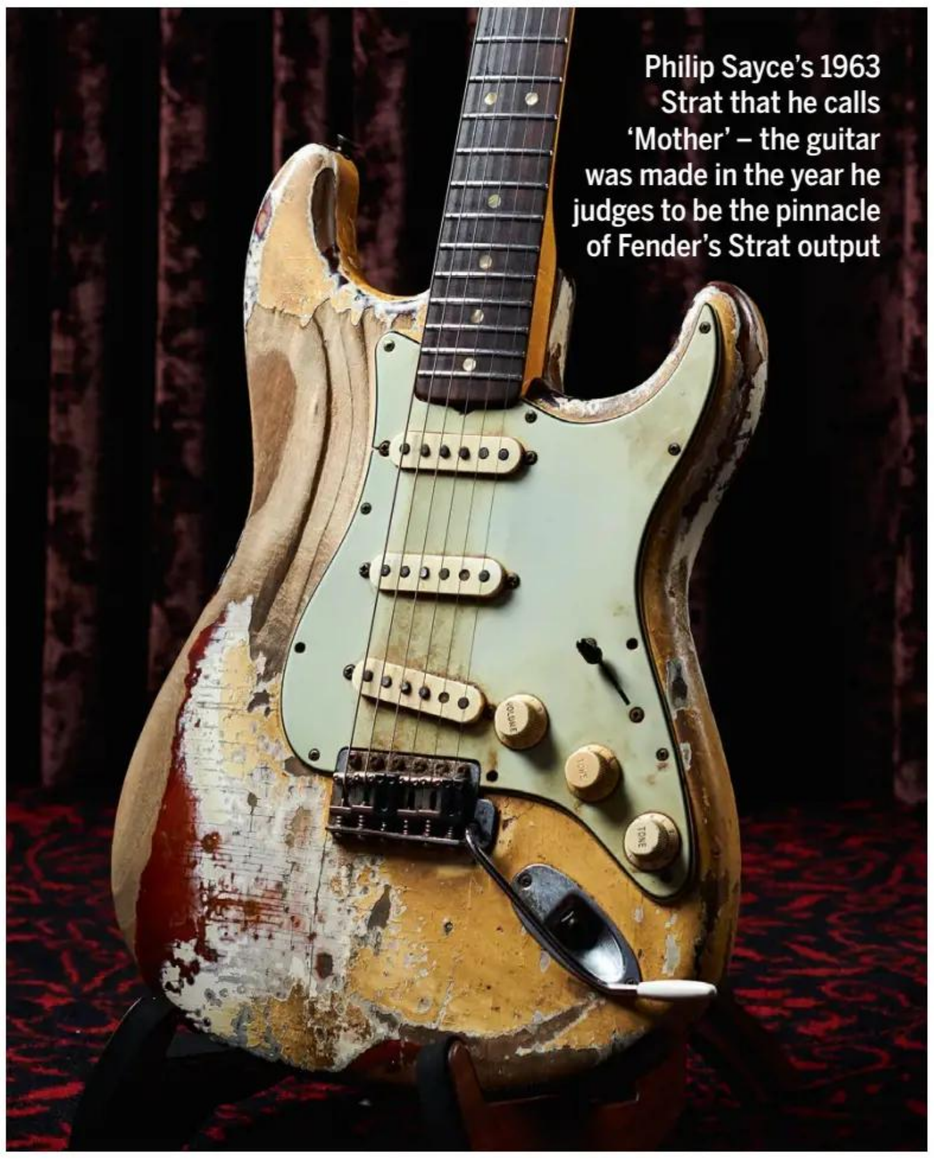
When did you get your first Strat and what was it?

"I got my Stratocaster in 1973 when I realised that it was what my sound was missing, and once I did... it changed my life 1,000 per cent. I have been able to write the jazz-influenced, dance-disco funk pop songs that people have loved for decades as well as rock, country, folk and EDM collaborations thanks to my Strat."

PHILIP SAYCE

When did you get your first Strat and what was it?

"When I was in high school I worked after school and weekends in the plumbing department at Canadian Tire, making minimum wage with a goal of saving up for a 90s inexpensive black Strat with a maple neck, something that looked just like Clapton's. Oh, how I cherished that guitar; I spent thousands of hours playing it until it was sadly stolen, just days before the high school Battle Of The Bands. That guitar definitely set me on the course to acquire my first vintage pre-CBS Strat, 'Mother'."



Philip Sayce's 1963 Strat that he calls 'Mother' – the guitar was made in the year he judges to be the pinnacle of Fender's Strat output

What is the ultimate Strat there's ever been?

"To me, it's the rosewood veneer-'board 1963 Strat. Stevie Ray Vaughan is the ultimate 'Strat Boss', and my understanding is that he very often played veneer-'board guitars from 1962 or '63. Pre-CBS Strats can be great for various reasons... and '63 seems like a sweet spot. Both of my Strats, 'Mother' and 'Big Daddy', are from 1963 and I consider these 60-year-plus single-coil guitars as transcending any brand name as they are covered in my blood, sweat and tears, and millions of miles, over the last 20 years. I cherish them and feel grateful to have them in my family."

JOSH SMITH

When did you get your first Strat and what was it?

"It was 1994 and I saved up my gig money every week to buy my Stevie Ray Vaughan Signature Strat. I felt like I finally had a real guitar when I got it. I was 14 and I played the guitar almost exclusively for the next 10 years. I still have it, of course. I was playing that guitar when I opened for and met BB King; he signed the back of the headstock for me. I was playing that guitar when I met my wife. There is a sticker that says 'I love Niki' right next to BB's signature. That guitar will be with me always."

In your opinion, what is the ultimate Strat there's ever been?

"First, the '57 Strat, my personal dream guitar: the 'V' neck shape, the two-tone burst, the maple neck with the first-year alder body. It's the most versatile Strat ever made. Perfect. Then the '63 Strat: the perfect rosewood-'board Strat. Sounds like Jimi, SRV and all the prototype Strat sounds I hear in my head. Those two years and you are covered with Strats forever!"

TASH SULTANA

When did you get your first Strat and what was it?

"I was always begging my dad to get a guitar, and on my eighth birthday I was playing in my room and dad came in and said, 'Get to the lounge!' I thought I'd broken something, but waiting for me was a Black Squier Stratocaster."

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ALYSSE GAFKJEN

Why do you play a Strat? What does it do for you that other guitars don't?

"I prefer the cutaway on the body so I can get right down and dirty on the neck. Other guitars obviously also provide that, but I've just landed on Strats in this era of my life. I've always been a big fan of Stratocaster players and their guitars. For me, the Strat is easy, it's lighter, and I can literally beat the shit out of it on stage and it handles it well."

What amp/pedal combination sounds best with a Strat?

"What I'm trying to approach in my drive tone is matching my gain and sustain, as well as presence. I like that 'metal' squeak in the bends and for the guitar to ring out as much as possible – almost like an electrical current is crawling through the guitar."

An original 1957 Strat from the Seven Decades Collection in London. Josh Smith reckons that year's distinctive 'V' neck profile makes it one of the true classics from the model's history

"The 'V' neck shape, the two-tone burst, the maple neck with the first-year alder body: the '57 Strat is the most versatile Strat ever made"

JOSH SMITH

PHOTO BY BRIAN KILLIAN/GETTY IMAGES

SHANE THERIOT

What Strat moment on a recording inspires you most?

"You can't mention a Stratocaster without mentioning Jeff Beck. His performance on *Live At Ronnie Scott's* shows what is possible with the instrument when combined with his highly skilled hands and ears. During that show he makes use of everything on the instrument – tone knobs, whammy bar and volume knobs – in a highly musical way that I don't think other players have ever done. The song *Where Were You* off *Jeff Beck's Guitar Shop* is such a beautiful piece of music that always inspires me."

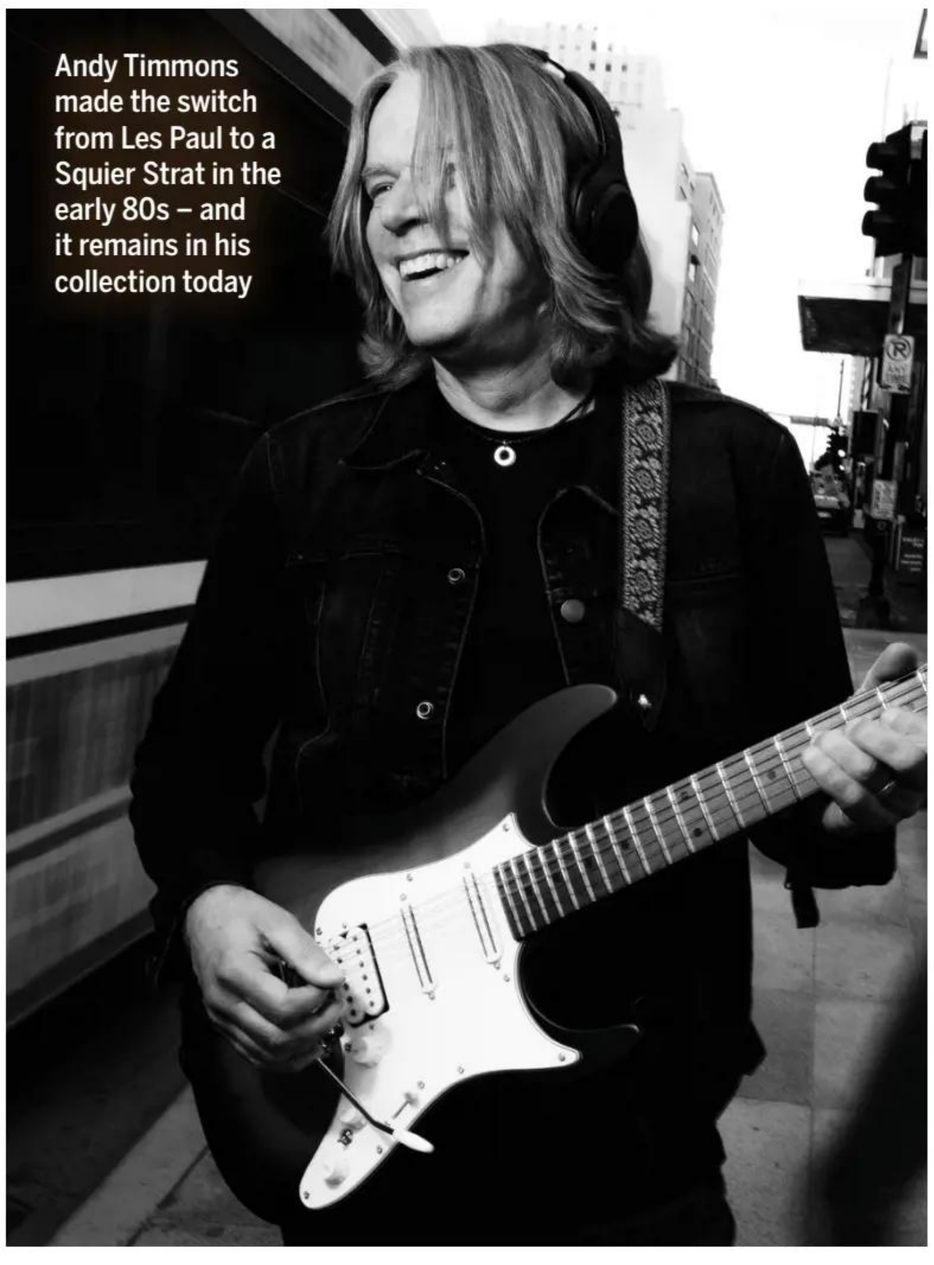
ANDY TIMMONS

When did you get your first Strat and what was it?

"I was in a Top 40 band in Miami, summer of 1984, and I only owned a Les Paul at the time, but all of pop radio was about the Nile Rogers' clean Strat rhythm tone, so I bought a 1983 Squier Strat – it was all I could afford. I immediately put EMGs in it because that's what Steve Lukather had in his guitars at that time. I still have that guitar and it's truly one of my best Strats!"

What is the greatest tone made with a Strat on a record?

"*Nowhere Man* by The Beatles, which I believe is John and George playing their matching Sonic Blue Strats, plugged into the same AC30 with massive compression and treble added at the board. I tried this for myself: two old Strats into an old AC30 – nailed the tone! Honourable mentions also go to *Texas Flood* by SRV and *Peggy Sue* by Buddy Holly."



Andy Timmons made the switch from Les Paul to a Squier Strat in the early 80s – and it remains in his collection today

ANDY TIMMONS PHOTOS BY TERESA JOLIE

What Strat moment on a recording inspires you most?

"Eric Johnson's entire Austin City Limits performance from 1991. That, paired with Stevie Ray Vaughan's *Live At The El Mocambo*, are the two ultimate documents of what the Stratocaster is capable of – along with Jeff Beck's *Emotion And Commotion* record and the *Band Of Gypsys* record... This is impossible [laughs]!"

CHRIS TURPIN

What Strat moment on a recording inspires you most?

"For me, it's the intro to *The Calvary Cross* by Richard and Linda Thompson. Thompson is a spellcaster. His playing style is frenetic, wild and entirely his own. The intro captures the essence of 1950s 'Strat tone' but somehow is oddly British. On a model of guitar that is so commonplace, probably more than any other guitar on the planet Earth... you instantly know it's him. To have such a distinctive voice and unique touch on the instrument is something I've always strived for."

JIMMIE VAUGHAN

Why do you play a Strat? What does it do for you that other guitars don't?

"I used to ride the bus downtown and look in the music store window at the Strat for months before I had one. For me, it's a rocket to outer space; it's my favourite guitar!"

PHOTO BY ALYSSE GAFKJEN

CARL VERHEYEN

What's your best tip for getting great tone out of a Strat?

"I believe string gauge has very little to do with tone, and action height has everything to do with it. I can get SRV's tone using a 0.009 to 0.046 set because my action is not down on the deck. Pickup height matters as well. If the pickups are too high, you lose clarity."

PHOTO BY PETER FIGEN PHOTOGRAPHY

In your opinion, what is the ultimate Strat there's ever been?

"They really got it right by the time the 60s rolled around. Once on tour in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, I ran into Seymour Duncan when we were both doing masterclasses at the university. He said, 'Verheyen, you're a Strat guy. The best-sounding three pickups in a row that I've heard in years is on a '58 Strat at Voltage Guitars on Sunset Boulevard in Hollywood. You should own it!' I picked it up a few days later and he was right! The neck pickup is fat and woodsy. The middle pickup is glassy with a sparkling high-end. And the bridge pickup is bright but not like an icepick in the ears. Exactly what a Strat should be!"

Rosewood or maple?

"I've come to believe I get more definition playing with higher gain on my maple-neck guitars. Especially below C# on the 4th fret of the A string. I try to avoid a mushy low-end, so I can use the guitar's entire range."

"Jimi Hendrix [is the greatest Strat player of all time]: he started it all and opened the doors for everybody"
OZ NOY

Jimi Hendrix at the Isle of Wight festival in 1970. By any measure Hendrix was the major disruptor and innovator in late-60s guitar and his astonishing flair on the Strat turned the model's fortunes around for Fender. He remains, for many, the greatest Strat player of all time

PHOTO BY CHRIS WALTER / WIREIMAGE / GETTY IMAGES

PROJECT MAKEOVER

A vintage Stratocaster is out of reach for most of us – but, with the correct parts and some diligent modding, a vintage-correct model that apes an original in both appearance and sound could be yours. But which year will it be: '54, '63 or '74? The choice is yours…

WORDS HUW PRICE

PROJECT 1: 1954-STYLE STRATOCASTER

When Fender released the Stratocaster in 1954, it was still a work in progress. There were several differences between the very earliest Strats and those that Fender was making by 1955. Some early features are merely cosmetic, while others have an audible effect on the tone. Here's our checklist for a vintage-correct early 1954 Stratocaster replica.

BODY, NECK & FINISH

Although pre-1958 Stratocaster sunbursts are usually described as 'two-tone', from late 1954 onwards there were actually three distinct shades: yellow, medium brown and tobacco brown. Only the very earliest 1954 Stratocasters had genuine two-tone sunbursts.

Achieving this look isn't hard, and advanced spraying skills aren't necessary to achieve vintage-correct results. This is largely because the sprayers at Fender were still figuring out how to spray sunbursts at that time and it shows in uneven shading and lots of stray dark-brown blobs in the light area of the 'burst. The following is not quite how Fender did it, but the results should be fairly convincing.

An ash body is a must and, after grain-filling and sanding sealer coats, spray the sides of the body and the edges with tobacco brown or black lacquer to create the sunburst. To save on lacquer, you can stain the sides with Jacobean Oak before spraying. With the 'burst complete, spray the whole body with amber lacquer and follow up with several clear-gloss coats.

Go through the usual stages of wet and dry sanding followed by polishing compound and relicing, if that's the look you want. For a donor guitar, see if you can track down a Fender Lite Ash Strat from the mid-Noughties.

PLASTICS

The very earliest Strats have no serial number on the neckplate and the spring cover was stamped instead. Rather than the elongated string holes of later years, 1954 spring covers had round string holes that were just big enough for the ball-end.

Unlike the tapered switch tip we're all used to, 1954 switch tips are nicknamed 'football' tips. To avoid confusion, we're talking American football here and the reason is obvious once you've seen one. The knob shape is also different, with a short skirt and straighter sides culminating in a wider top. These knobs were moulded from a white plastic that had a marbled appearance.

The pickup covers stayed very white and the edges were noticeably rounded compared with later covers.

1. The brittle plastics used on pickup covers on early Strats tended to stay very white over time, as on this pristine 1954 guitar

2. No branding in the blank central section of these Kluson tuners marks them out as early ‘no line’ models

3. Long, carefully sculpted belly cuts were typical of very early Strats such as this ’54 example

PHOTOS BY JOBY SESSIONS

They were also notoriously flimsy and would wear through to expose the tops of the pickups. 1954 repro plastic parts are sold in sets by Armstrong Music, RebelRelic and others.

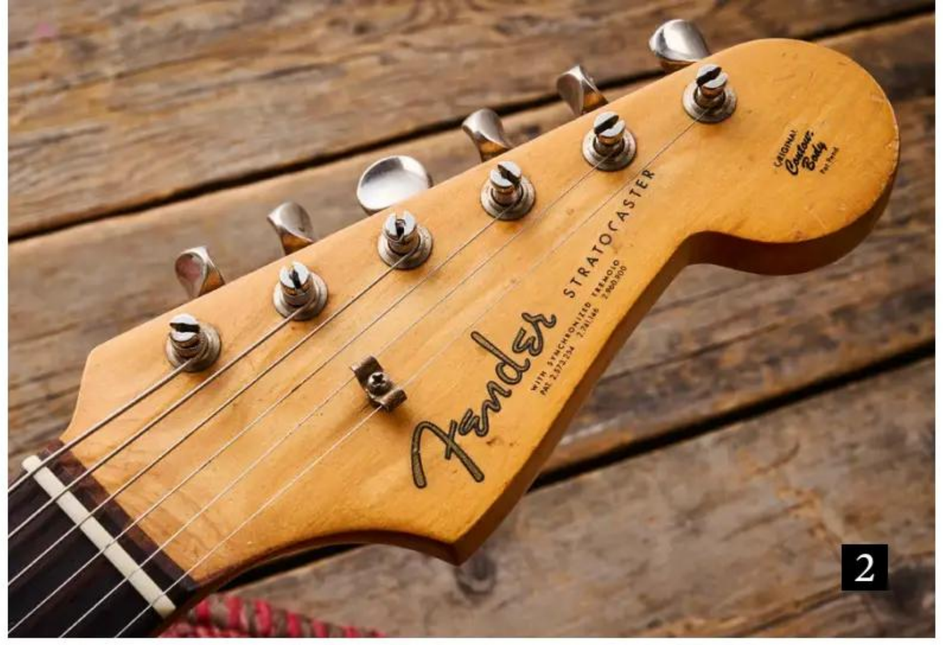
HARDWARE & ELECTRONICS

In 1954, Kluson tuners were unstamped, so were neither single- nor double-line. You’ll need a round string-tree and, while you’re considering the headstock, note how ’54 edges were rounded over. Fortunately, a regular jack plate and vintage-style bridge will suffice. Just ensure you have pressed-steel saddles and a cold-rolled steel vibrato block.

Strats started out with 100k potentiometers, rather than 250k; this mellows the brightness and gives a smoother tone with a flatter frequency response. Couple these with a repro Orange ‘phone book’ paper/foil capacitor if you have the funds, but any 0.1µF capacitor should suffice.

Fender introduced staggered slugs with Strat pickups, but the early 1954 stagger had the G slug lower than the D slug. Alnico III magnets with a 1/5-inch diameter were also used, and most boutique pickup winders should be able to replicate a ’54 set. The early stagger might not sound quite right with plain G strings, so that’s one detail you may choose to omit. Check out House Of Tone’s aged vintage-correct 1954 set, complete with rounded covers and 52.8mm slug spacing.

1



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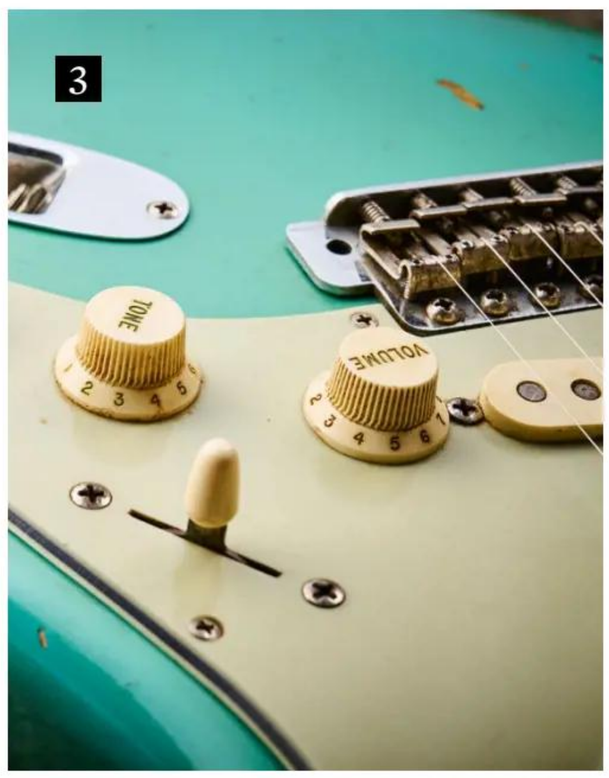

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PHOTOS BY PHIL BARKER

1. This Foam Green 1963 Strat is one of the rarer colours available in that period and was applied in the factory over a sunburst. Specialist suppliers can help you match these iconic hues, however

2. Lacquer checking and darkening of areas like the headstock can be carefully emulated on your own Strat

3. The 'green' nitrate pickguards on original 1963 Strats like this one may be 'unobtainium' but modern plastic repros do the job well

PROJECT 2: 1963 STRATOCASTER

For a vintage-correct 1963 replica, you'll need an alder wood body, preferably 2kg (4.4lb) or less, and a neck with a rosewood veneer 'board. Some of the Mexican-made vintage reissues are a great starting point, and we recommend Tokai Goldstar copies from the early 80s.

BODY, NECK & FINISH

If you want the vintage look, complete with grain lines and checking, a reliced nitrocellulose finish is the way to go. The same goes for the neck because many players prefer the feel of nitrocellulose or a neck that's been stripped to simulate wear. Stripping a poly-finished body can be time consuming, but the only requirements are a heat gun and plenty of patience.

You'll find a wide range of vintage-correct colours in aerosols from suppliers such as Manchester Guitar Tech and Rothko And Frost, so if you want to go the DIY route, check out some YouTube tutorials and give it a go. Alternatively, most professional guitar finishers are able to spray and relic nitro finishes, and getting a guitar refinished is a cheaper option than buying a custom-made or Custom Shop instrument.

PLASTICS

The green nitrate pickguard is one of the most striking features of any original 1963 Stratocaster. However, vintage examples have become eye-wateringly expensive and genuine celluloid repros are incredibly scarce. Occasionally, somebody will do a production run and they do show up at retailers such as Crazy Parts, or on eBay and Reverb.

Lashing's celluloid pickguards are worth checking out, but non-celluloid green 'guards are cheaper and widely available. During 1963, the screw between the neck and middle pickups shifted from dead centre towards the middle, but both versions are fine for a 1963 replica.

After 1956, Fender began using a different type of plastic for knobs, switch tips and pickup covers. These parts could turn quite creamy or even light brown in colour. If you're creating a replica, there are plenty of aged plastic parts to choose from in various shades of off-white. The spring cover always remained single-ply and originals stayed fairly white.

HARDWARE & ELECTRONICS

You will need a 'butterfly' string-tree with a metal spacer, and if you're buying Kluson tuners, make sure they're single- ,rather than double-, line versions. Otherwise, for practical purposes, the bridge, block and saddle specs are identical to a 1954's. The same cannot be said for the electronics, however.

One striking difference is the full-sized aluminium shielding plate, which was presumably Fender's attempt to reduce single-coil noise in the wake of humbucking pickups. In our experience, the plate has a subtle effect, softening the glassy upper midrange and giving Strats a smoother character. Since they only cost between £10 and £15, it doesn't make any sense not to fit one. Check out Charles Guitars for options.

By 1963, Fender had started using a cheaper ceramic tone capacitor, but the value remained 0.1µF. You can buy nice replicas from Fake58, who sells reproduction parts, complete with the short length of yellow insulation tubing that fits between the capacitor and the neck pickup's tone control solder tag.

But most importantly, from mid-1962 Stratocaster pickups had narrower 3/16-inch slugs. This focuses the magnetic field more directly under the individual strings and provides a bit more space for extra windings. These later pre-CBS pickups can sound hotter than earlier examples, with a sweet response, added weight and tighter lows. For the correct 1963 specs, check out Bare Knuckles Pickups' Veneer Board set.

1. This 1974 Strat, shot at World Guitars in Stonehouse, bears all the small spec changes associated with Fender's svelte double-cut that year

2. The relatively clean look of the headstock can be partly ascribed to the use of poly finishes for both body and neck by this era

3. Blockier Mazak (or zamak aka 'monkey metal') saddles were, like them or not, a key change to the Strat's design by 1974. This guitar's pickups appear to pre-date the move to non-staggered slugs, however, possibly making it an early 1974 model

PHOTOS BY PHIL BARKER

PROJECT 3: 1974 STRATOCASTER

The notion that all 70s Stratocasters were a bit rubbish has been well and truly debunked. Comparing them to pre-CBS Strats makes as much sense as comparing Blackguard Telecasters with mid-1960s Teles. They are sufficiently different to be judged on their own terms, rather than suffer in spurious comparison. With interest in 70s Strats increasing, along with their prices, maybe it's time to think big headstock.

BODY, NECK & FINISH

By 1974, Fender had ceased using nitrocellulose and the bodies and necks both had poly finishes. Modern donor guitars and the bodies and necks offered by parts suppliers generally come with poly finishes, so there's no need to budget for an expensive refinish – you only need to decide which colour you prefer. Most aftermarket bodies are pre-drilled for a four-bolt neck, but 'partscaster' bodies sometimes come undrilled and three-bolt kits are readily available online. Official Fender ones can be found on Reverb and eBay, but many consider the four-bolt arrangement superior, both sonically and structurally, and this is one period detail you may choose to forgo.

The headstock is the most important bit. It has to be big, and it has to have a 'bullet' truss-rod adjuster and that iconic bendy logo decal. Your best bet will almost certainly be a Fender Classic Series neck. You might even consider a Classic Series Strat or one of the other Mexican reissues. Alternatively, check out Squier SQ, Greco Super Sounds and Tokai Silver Star models from the 80s 'golden era'.

PLASTICS

By 1974, Fender was using cheaper vinyl plastic-style three-ply 'guards, which look off-white with a black centre layer. The black/white/black pickguards didn't appear until 1975, and the pickup covers and knobs didn't differ that much from the later pre-CBS plastics.

For a 1974 replica, we'd be inclined to find a set of lightly aged and slightly off-white or cream plastic parts. You often see a bit of greening of the lettering on 70s knobs, and some replacement parts capture that quite well. Those of a DIY persuasion may consider relicing their own and there are plenty of tutorial videos detailing a range of methods.

HARDWARE & ELECTRONICS

The cost-cutting CBS Corporation had stopped using aluminium shield plates by 1974, and 70s pickguards usually have some foil glued to the underside around the control area instead. Tone capacitors were ceramic disk types, but the value had changed from 0.1µF to 0.05µF. The modern equivalent is 0.047µF, and 0.003µF doesn't make an audible difference, but both will make a Strat sound a tad brighter and glassier than a 0.1µF capacitor.

1974 pickups featured plain enamel magnet wire, an average DCR of around 5.5k and, for the first time, non-staggered slugs with no edge bevel. This combination gives a fairly bright and sparkly tone, with plenty of bite and definition. They're not as fat or warm as early 60s pickups, but it's a classic tone nevertheless.

Fender made changes to the bridge assembly and, in 1974, they were single-piece units moulded from a cheaper alloy. So were the new 'blocky' saddles, and the alloy used was zamak aka 'Mazak'. These parts are named 'monkey metal', but that doesn't mean they sound bad. After all, some vintage Gibson fans will pay big sums for 1950s Mazak tailpieces and ABR-1 bridges.

Mazak has a warmer, fatter tone than steel, and is therefore a good match for 70s Strat pickups as well as PAFs. You may prefer steel bridge parts if sustain and brightness are priorities, but Mazak bridges contribute massively to that mid-'70 tone, and you can top that off with two 'butterfly' string trees with nylon spacers and a set of repro 'F' stamped tuners.

FENDER STRATOCASTER HANDBOOK

This is the top-of-the line evolution of the guitar that Leo Fender and Freddie Tavares designed seven decades ago

FORM, FUNCTION, FINESSE

To celebrate yet another anniversary for Fender's world-beating 1954 design, the company has thrown everything it knows about building great Strats into the melting pot

WORDS NEVILLE MARTEN PHOTOGRAPHY PHIL BARKER

You will likely have read many times in *Guitarist*'s pages that no two Strats are the same. And if you own more than one of these game-changing guitars you'll appreciate the truth in that statement. Ash body, alder body, rosewood or maple fingerboard, hardtail, traditional or floating vibrato; these apparently minor changes all impact the tone, albeit in subtle ways. Pickup height, string action, neck carve, and roller or conventional nut also play their part in how the guitar feels and sounds to each of us.

Back in the day, pretty much every operation to build a Fender guitar was carried out by workers who hand-sanded, hand-wound and hand-finished every aspect. And while much of this still happens in today's Corona California facility, modern production techniques mean tolerances are much tighter, and consistency is better by a long way.

During our testing period, the guitar we have here was subjected to a 'Stratocaster Shootout' where it battled against some heavyweight opponents from the 50s, 60s and 70s, as well as from Fender's own mighty Custom Shop. It did anything but disgrace itself in their company, and endeared itself to the players (this reviewer included) in the process. So, what is it that makes us sing its praises so highly?

First of all, look at it! What a handsome beast it is, with its Comet Burst-finished flamed-maple top over an alder body, faux tortoiseshell pickguard and dark rosewood fingerboard, it's every inch a Fender thoroughbred. However, there's a lot more to the guitar than a quick glance reveals: the two-point floating vibrato bridge has been upgraded and features a cold-rolled steel block; pickups are the excellent 70th Anniversary V-Mod II single coils, each of which has been voiced for its specific position; and a push-push pot on the second tone pot brings in the neck pickup when positions 1 or 2 are selected, availing us of neck and bridge together, or all three pickups on – sounds not available from a conventional Strat.

Flip the body over and you'll notice the chamfered heel with 70th Anniversary neckplate, while running your fingers along the satin-finished neck will reveal how the fingerboard edges have been rolled for added comfort. Short-post locking tuners are there to help retain the guitar's tuning when using the more divebomb-friendly two-point vibrato, and let's not forget the 241mm (9.5-inch) radius 'board with tall narrow frets, designed for choke-free string bends and improved fretting accuracy.

We can't say for sure, but had Leo been given the chance to refine his creation seven decades down the line, it's likely that most of his potential upgrades are here. Constructionally and finish-wise, though, this guitar rivals many boutique makers' quality.

FEEL & SOUNDS

Grabbing the American Pro II out of its blue-lined Inca silver case and sitting it on our lap, we're greeted with a reassuringly satisfying lump of wood, plastic and metal. There's something pleasing, too, about a guitar that proclaims its newness, with no pretensions to ageing. The urethane Comet Burst finish glows over the centre-joined flame maple body cap, and Fender's attention to detail is evident all around, from the smooth feel of the satin neck to its rosewood fingerboard's beautiful fret job and gently rounded (rolled) edges.

Before playing a note, the string action looks welcomingly low to medium height, but start chording, sliding, bending and hammering, and it's clear we have an exceptionally fine instrument here. The neck fills the hand perfectly, with just the right depth for tireless playing over long periods (20.8mm at the 1st fret fattening to 23.3mm at the 12th), and the strings glide over the 22 finely finished frets, making bends a breeze and vibrato slinky smooth.

With its two-point floating vibrato there's more travel and control here than with a screwed-down vintage type, and after a bit of new-string stretching it returns the guitar to pitch perfectly after gentle waggles or more drastic scoops and doops.

Our Laney Lionheart L20 combo has paired beautifully with every guitar we've put through it, and the 70th Anniversary Professional II is no different. It's a distinctly modern set of tones that one encounters. There's tons of clarity but with no hint of brashness. It's almost like a 'produced' Strat sound, as though it's been through a mixing board and some sort of 'exciter'.

The V-Mod pickups are exceptional, and while they're not Noiseless types, as on the Ultra Strat also featured in the head-to-head (and which Leo probably would have stipulated), there was no obvious hum. All the pickup selections are clear, and as definitive in each position as we can recall. Imagine all the classic Strat tones and the Professional II offers a crystallisation of each one. It's great to press the push-push pot to bring in neck and bridge pickup or all three units together, as these are fat and funky tones that we'd use a lot.

Piling on the Lionheart's gain, the guitar remains focused and articulate. There's no wooliness but no piercing treble, either. Anyway, it's simple enough to tweak the bridge pickup's tone control to achieve more Les Paul Deluxe or Firebird-type girth. You could spend many pleasant hours finding out just what a guitar like this is capable of, and it's a lot.

VERDICT

Checking around it seems that the 70th Anniversary American Professional Stratocaster II is streeting at a little less than its stated price. That's a heck of a lot of guitar for the money, given that a Custom Shop NOS '63 Strat Relic is almost exactly double that. And if the 70th Anniversary thing doesn't particularly grab you, then the regular American Professional II Strat is available for a couple of hundred less and you can get it as a lefty, too.

Operationally, the guitar just works. Everything about it is sensible. It's a refinement of Leo's original proposition in every respect and does all that's required of it impeccably. The locking tuners are relevant since there's so much more travel available from the two-point vibrato, the extra pickup selections are a genuine plus point, and not only does the guitar sound incredible, it plays beautifully and looks a million dollars. And what more could any working guitarist want? A very fine guitar indeed.

1. Fitted with a two-point floating vibrato there's more travel here than with a vintage style unit. And don't the tinted plastics look great against the tortoise style pickguard? The controls look normal, but the one closest is a push-push that selects middle pickup when positions 1 or 2 are selected, to allow all three or neck and bridge together

2. The neck's pitch is adjustable at the dressed-away heel via a hole in the 70th Anniversary four-bolt chrome plate. Note too the walnut skunk stripe running down the maple neck

"You could spend many pleasant hours finding out just what a guitar like this is capable of, and it's a lot"

2

The Pro II's tuners are short-post locking types, relevant here due to the extra travel available from the two-point vibrato with cold-rolled steel block

FENDER 70TH ANNIVERSARY AMERICAN PROFESSIONAL II STRATOCASTER

PRICE: £1,829 (inc case)
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: Double-cutaway, solidbody electric
BODY: Solid alder with 2-piece centre-matched flame maple cap
NECK: Maple, deep C profile
SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")
NUT/WIDTH: Bone/42.8 mm
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood, 241mm (9.5") radius, dot inlays
FRETS: 22, tall narrow
HARDWARE: Upgraded 2-point floating vibrato with cold-rolled steel block, short-post locking tuners, face-mounted jack receptacle, all chrome-plated
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 52.4mm
ELECTRICS: 3x V-Mod II single coils voiced for position, 5-way blade switch, 1x volume, 2x tones (1x on bridge pickup with push-push pot bringing in neck pickup in positions 1 and 2)
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.81/8.4
OPTIONS: No
RANGE OPTIONS: 70th Anniversary range also includes the Player Stratocaster (£959), Vintera II Antigua Stratocaster (£1,189), American Vintage II 1954 Stratocaster (£2,489), and Ultra Stratocaster HSS (£2,489)
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISH: Comet Burst (as reviewed)

Fender Musical Instruments EMEA
01342 331700
www.fender.com

Guitarist CHOICE

9/10

PROS A genuinely fine representation of a modern Stratocaster; full of sensible refinements; looks, plays and sounds just as good as its professional but inherently fair price-tag suggests

CONS Really nothing, although Leo Fender himself might have suggested Noiseless pickups as the final upgrade

HEROES

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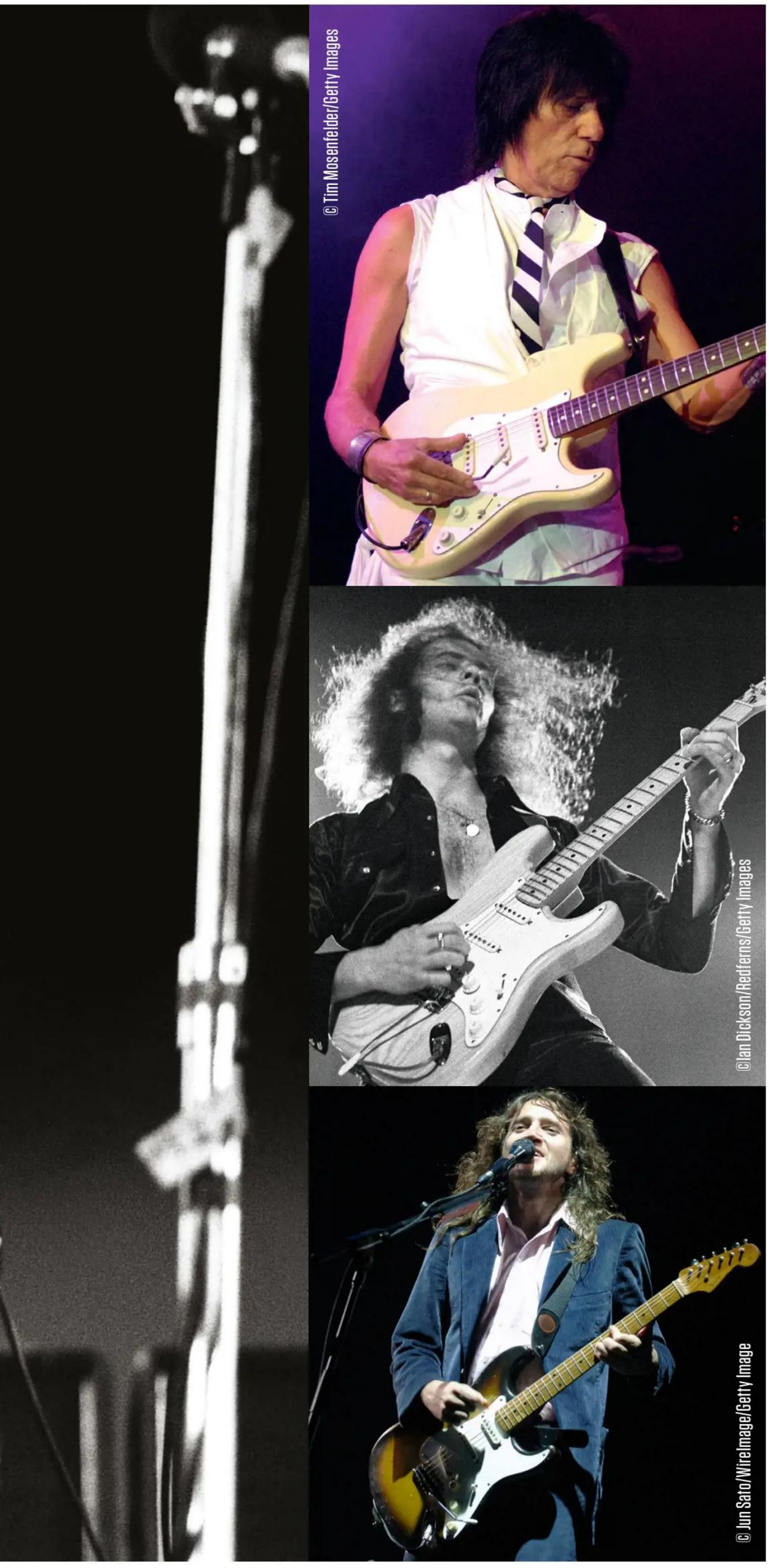
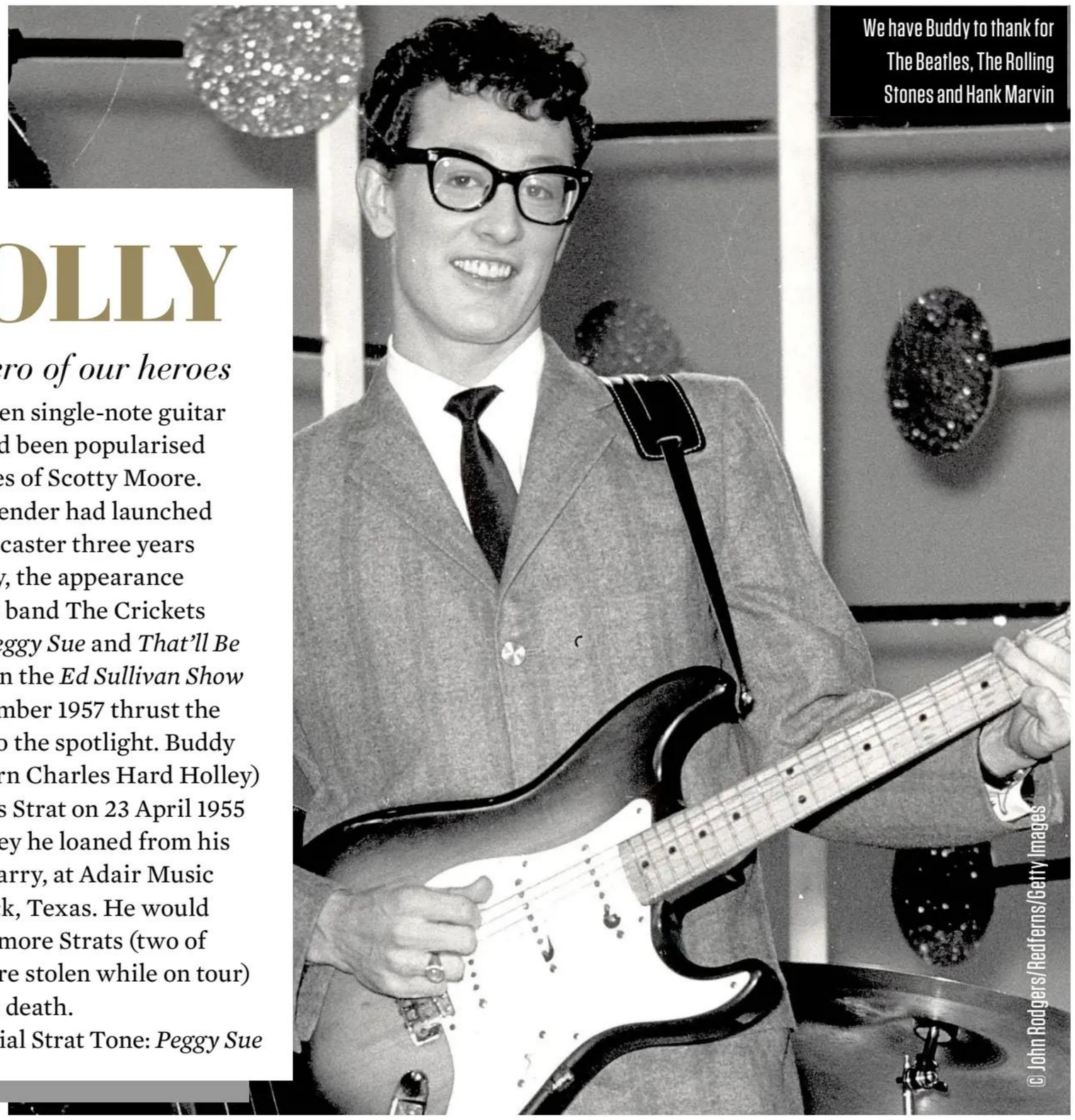


HEROES

92..... **Strat Legends**
108..... **Hank Marvin**
114..... **Jimi Hendrix**
126..... **Eric Clapton**
132..... **Gary Moore**

STRAT LEGENDS

As Leo Fender's masterpiece double-cut turns 70, we salute and study the techniques of the players who made the Stratocaster famous. From single-coil twang to Floyd-equipped shred, join us as we celebrate the guitar they said would never catch on...



We have Buddy to thank for The Beatles, The Rolling Stones and Hank Marvin

© John Rodgers/Redferns/Getty Images

BUDDY HOLLY

The leader of the Strat pack; the hero of our heroes

Buddy Holly was taken far too soon, at the age of just 22 in an air crash on 3 February 1959, immortalised by Don Henley as "the day the music died" in his 1971 song *American Pie*. In that time, Buddy had created a rock 'n' roll blueprint of two guitars, bass and drums that would inspire McCartney, Lennon, Dylan, The Stones and many more.

He would do more to popularise the Stratocaster in the decade of its inception than any other artist. An accomplished guitarist, aside from his songwriting genius, Buddy brought a hybrid of rhythm and lead to fledgling rock 'n' roll at a time when single-note guitar breaks had been popularised by the likes of Scotty Moore. Though Fender had launched the Stratocaster three years previously, the appearance by Holly's band The Crickets playing *Peggy Sue* and *That'll Be The Day* on the *Ed Sullivan Show* on 1 December 1957 thrust the guitar into the spotlight. Buddy Holly (born Charles Hard Holley) bought his Strat on 23 April 1955 with money he loaned from his brother Larry, at Adair Music in Lubbock, Texas. He would own four more Strats (two of which were stolen while on tour) before his death.

Essential Strat Tone: *Peggy Sue*

"The Strat had never sounded more sleazy"

© Redferns/ Michael Ochs Archives / Stringer /Getty Images

DICK DALE

The silver surfer with the red-hot riffs

In the early 60s, he'd been a pioneer of surf-guitar, and while souped-up Fender amps and reverb played a part, Dale insisted the Strat was the cornerstone of his brittle, tremolo-picked tone. "The sound is a Stratocaster guitar," he once noted. "It's the solidity of the wood. The thicker the wood, the bigger and purer the sound. It was a Strat. Not the Jaguar, not the Jazzmaster."

The surf scene wiped out, and Dale looked washed-up, but in 1994 he was at the heart of the most electrifying movie credits sequence of the age. "Any of you fucking pricks move and I'll execute every motherfucking last one of you!" screeches Honey Bunny at the start of Quentin Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction* – and so begins the warp-speed, staccato-note thrill-ride of Dale's *Misirlou*. The Strat had never sounded more sleazy, seedy or downright dangerous.

Essential Strat Tone: *Misirlou*

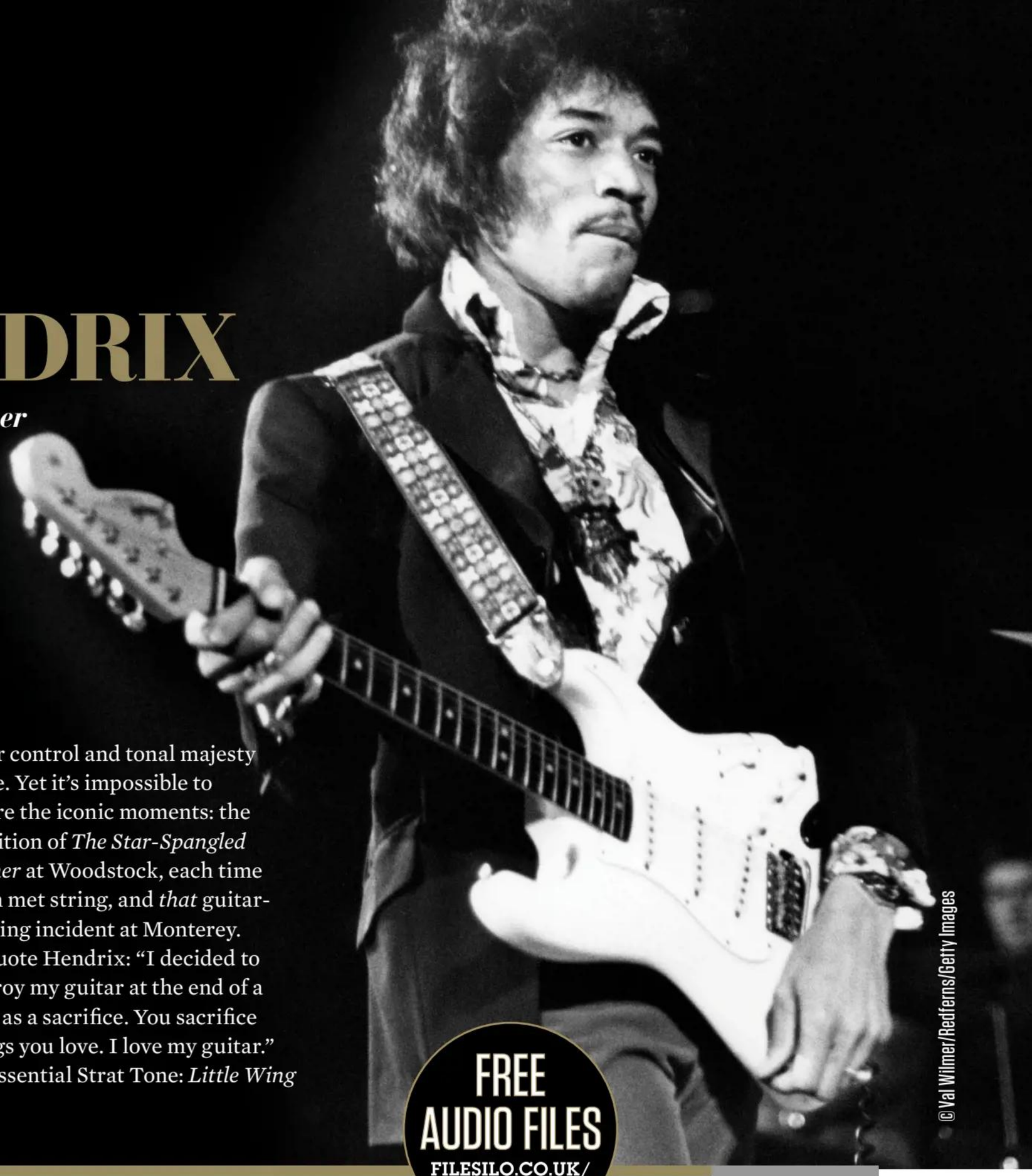
JIMI HENDRIX

Waving the Strat-spangled banner

James Marshall Hendrix is famous for many things – and he had a Strat slung around his shoulders for most of 'em. Left-handed guitars were even harder to come by in Jimi's 60s heyday, so he flipped his Strats over and restrung them back-to-front.

This approach helped to shape his tone – the slanted bridge pickup gave more treble to his lower strings and a darker tonality to the high strings, while his tendency to jam his guitar's three-way pickup selector in between pickups was partly responsible for Fender introducing the five-way pickup selector. Singling out Hendrix's Strat highlights is an unenviable task, but the graceful dexterity of *Little Wing* and outlandish aggression of *Voodoo Child (Slight Return)* are up there, for sheer control and tonal majesty alone. Yet it's impossible to ignore the iconic moments: the rendition of *The Star-Spangled Banner* at Woodstock, each time teeth met string, and *that* guitar-burning incident at Monterey. To quote Hendrix: "I decided to destroy my guitar at the end of a song as a sacrifice. You sacrifice things you love. I love my guitar."

Essential Strat Tone: *Little Wing*



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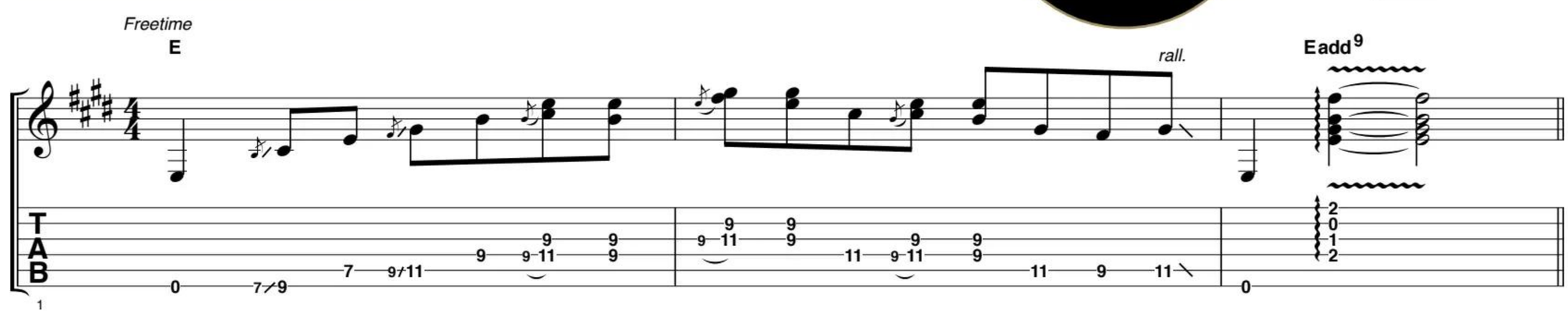
JIMI HENDRIX PARTIAL CHORDS

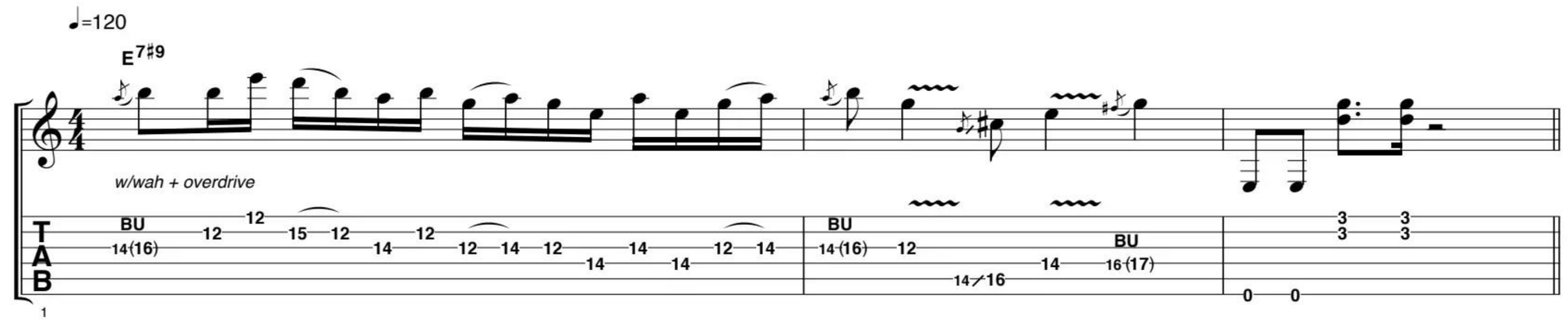
Track 23



Jimi often used the 'in-between' pickup selection to augment his rhythm ideas. In typical Jimi style, our riff outlines a major chord by using lots of other related notes. It creates a rich weaving sound that's much more sophisticated than playing straight chords.

JIMI HENDRIX WAH/DIST LEAD

Track 24



Jimi would often use the middle pickup for both lead and rhythm, and a wah pedal is the icing on the cake. Our example showcases Jimi's minor pentatonic lead playing. Notice the C# and F# notes taken from outside the E minor pentatonic scale to add colour.

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BUDDY GUY

Knocking the spots off other bluesmen

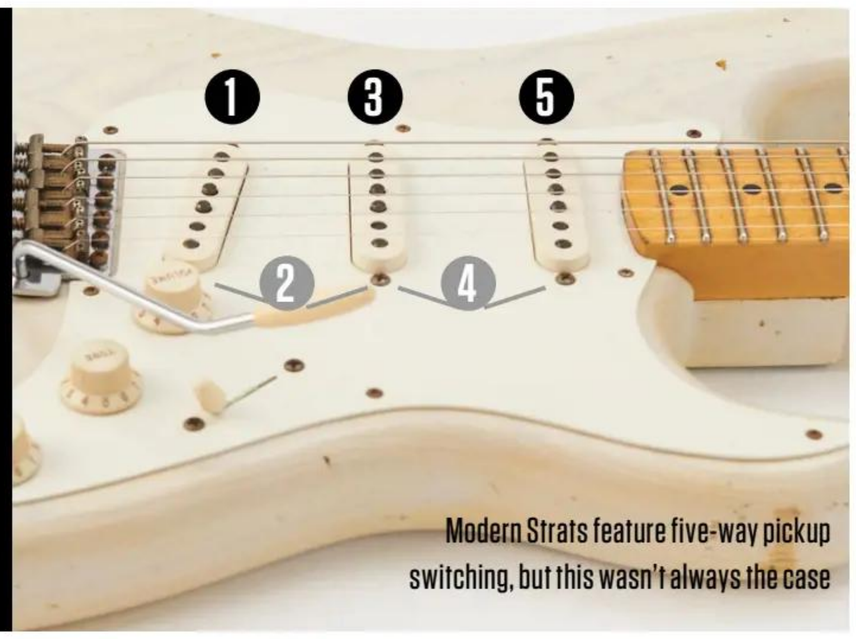
When Guy hit the Chicago circuit in 1957, he was the wildest Strat cat in town, opening shows by bursting through the front doors playing guitar on a 100-foot lead, and ripping out feral solos that terrified his Chess Records paymasters. "I've been playing guitar with fire my whole life," he says.

Essential Strat Tone: *Justifyin'*

THE INBETWEENERS

From its launch in 1954, the Stratocaster was fitted with a three-way pickup selector switch, offering a choice of using each pickup on its own. Soon after, many players started to realise that by carefully positioning the switch between each setting, the Strat would produce two extra sounds. These 'in-between' settings would produce a thinner, quacky sound, and guitarists would often use matchsticks or toothpicks to hold the switch just-so.

It took 23 years, but in 1977 Fender finally resolved to fitting the five-way switch that is now standard, appeasing tonehounds, and putting a dent in the toothpick industry. And, in case you are wondering, the position switches start at the bridge pickup (1) and follow up to the neck pickup (5).



Modern Strats feature five-way pickup switching, but this wasn't always the case

© Keystone/Hulton Archive/Getty Images

Cliff's gift to Hank Marvin of a Fiesta Red Strat was a gift to modern British guitar music

HANK MARVIN

The British invasion

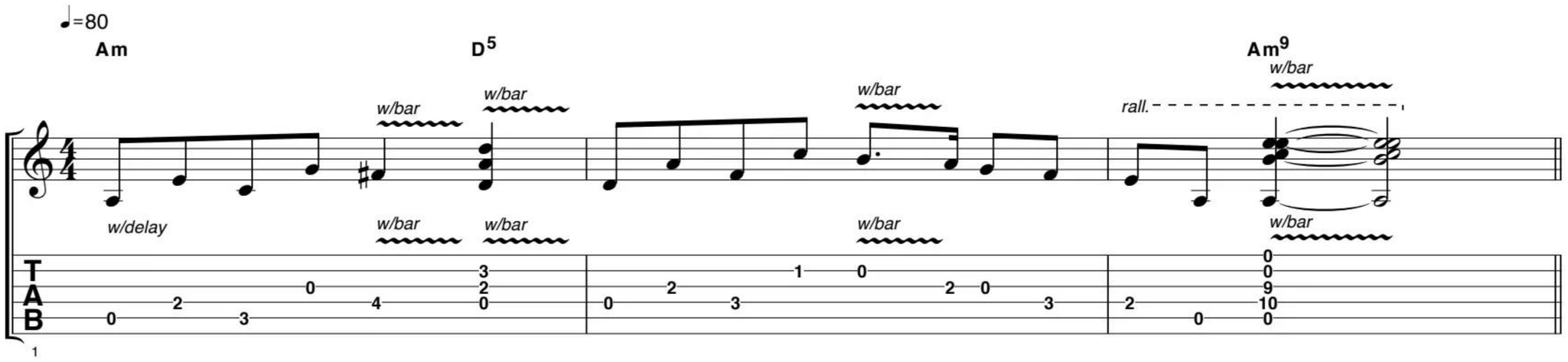
There were perks to being the sideman of teenybopper king Cliff Richard in 1959 – not least the chance to secure one of the first Strats on British soil. "Cliff wanted to buy me a good guitar, and we decided Fender was the way to go," recalls Marvin of his Fiesta Red model. "It came in a tweed case with red plush lining, and this magnificent-looking thing was just lying inside. It was like something from space, really, it was so futuristic in its design."

By 1960, Marvin secured his place in the Strat pantheon with The Shadows' hit instrumental *Apache*, which combined an economical twanged melody with expert wobbles of the revolutionary vibrato unit to create a vibe somewhere between surf-guitar and spaghetti western.

Essential Strat Tone: *Apache*

HANK MARVIN MELODIC LICK

Track 25



This example is in the style of early electric guitar pioneer Hank Marvin. Hank combined a glassy bridge pickup tone with subtle use of the vibrato bar, but picked the notes near the neck pickup to create his signature sound. Tape-style echo will bring things to life.

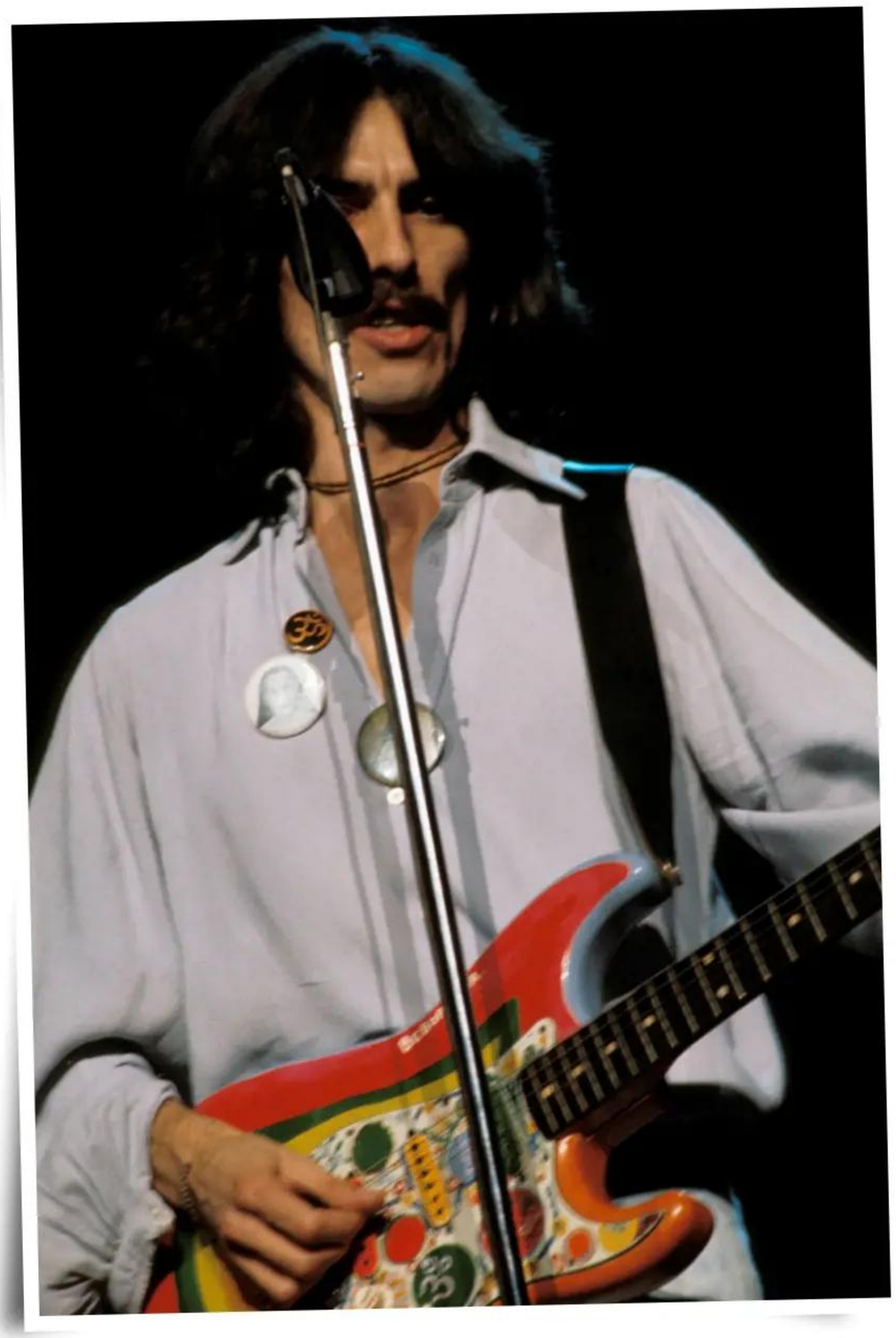
GEORGE HARRISON

Here comes the sun(burst)

February 1965 saw Beatles roadie Mal Evans purchase Strats at George Harrison and John Lennon's behest. Although Harrison recalled this as during the *Rubber Soul* sessions, The Beatles were recording *Help!* at the time, as proven by photos of Lennon at Abbey Road with one of the Sonic Blue pair Evans bought.

Nowhere Man is probably the most overt example of a Strat on a Beatles recording: George and John are playing their Fenders in unison. Harrison's Strat – neckplate dated December 1961 – would get a psychedelic makeover and become known as 'Rocky'. Post-Beatles, George chose a white Strat for the 1971 Concert For Bangladesh that some have speculated was assembled from the same haul of parts that yielded Eric Clapton's famous Blackie.

Essential Strat Tone: *Nowhere Man*



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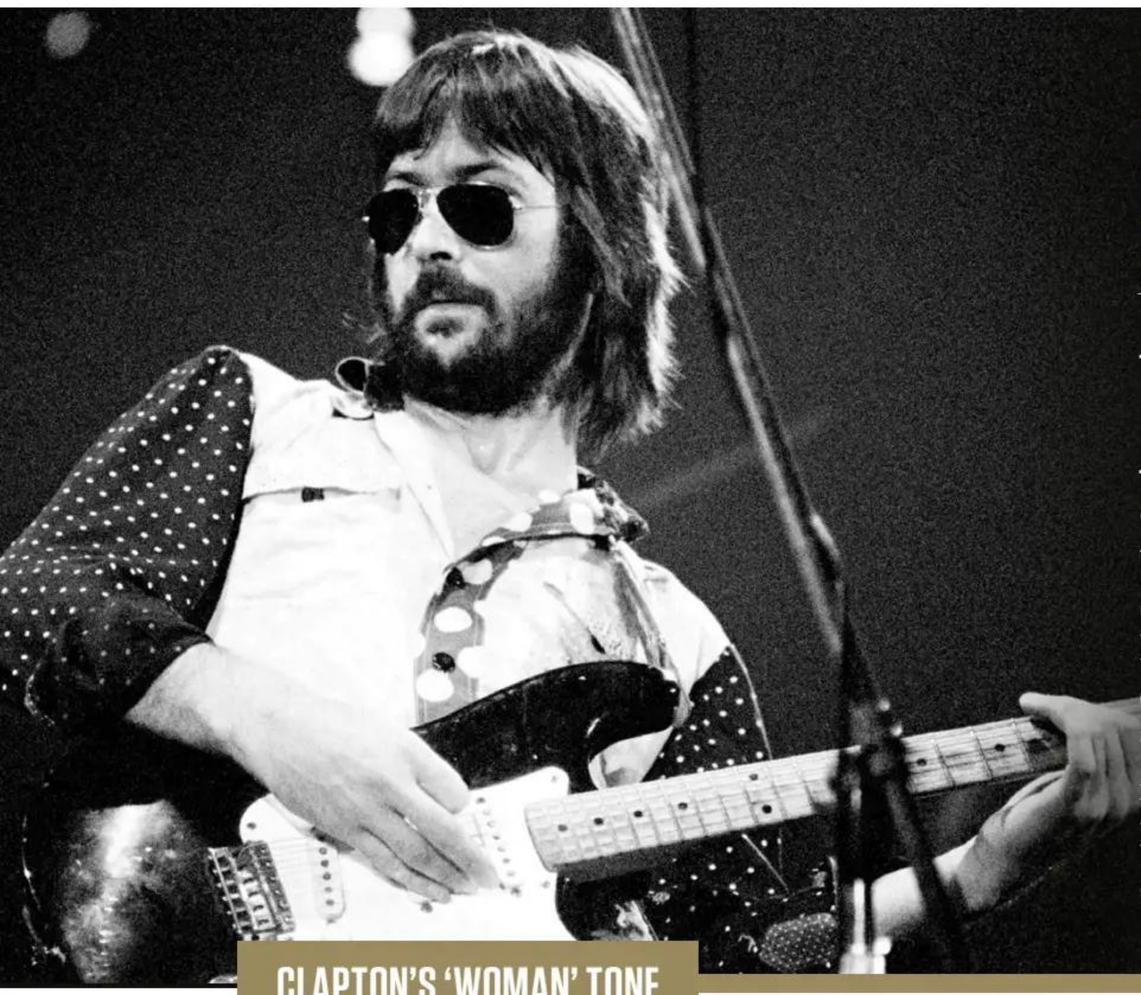
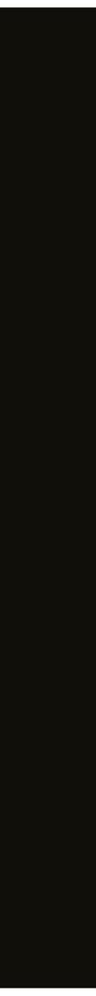


ERIC CLAPTON

Eric wasn't always a Strat man…

By the end of the 1960s, 24-year-old Eric was already a guitar hero, having played with The Yardbirds, John Mayall's Bluesbreakers and Cream. His guitars of choice had been Fender Jazzmasters and Telecasters, Gibson Les Pauls, ES-335s and SGs. However, once he unleashed the opening riff of *Layla* in 1970 – played on a 1956 sunburst Strat called 'Brownie' – Clapton and the Stratocaster were inextricably linked. 'Brownie' saw action during Eric's early 70s blues-rock heyday; his other celebrated Strat, 'Blackie', fashioned by Clapton out of three '56 and '57 model Strats, was his main guitar from 1973 until 1985. Since Eric's return to his blues roots in the late 80s, his Strat tones have come from Fender's EC signature models. The noiseless pickups and mid-boost circuit are the key to Eric's sound of the last 25 years.

Essential Strat Tone: *Cocaine*



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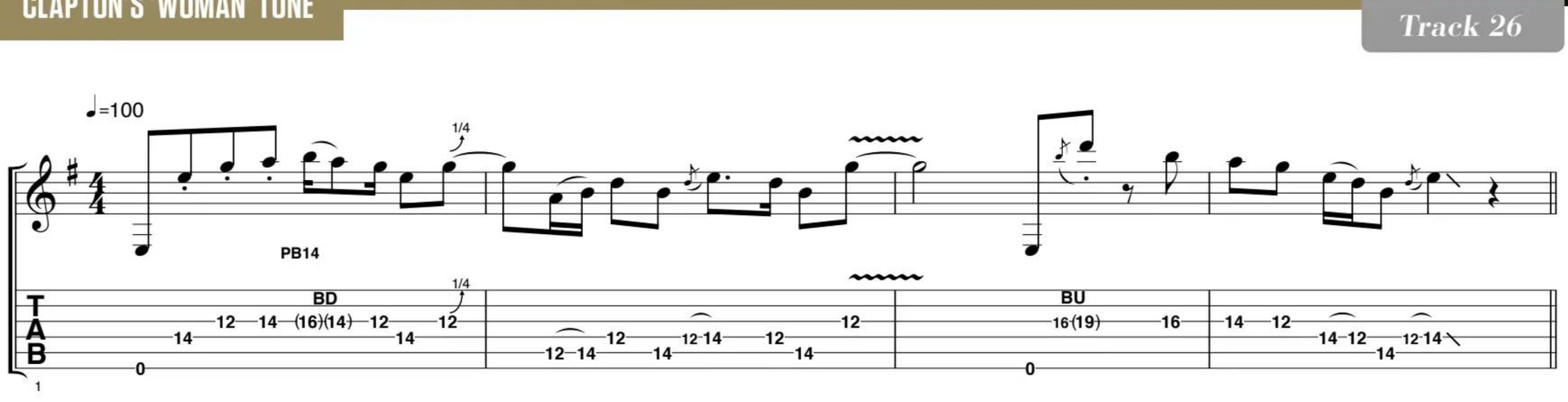
CLAPTON'S 'WOMAN' TONE

Track 26



Eric began his love affair with the Strat in 1970 on the *Layla And Other Assorted Love Songs* album. His 'woman' tone was originally performed on Gibson guitars with humbuckers, but you can replicate it by using a Strat neck pickup with the tone rolled off and the midrange on your amp boosted.

NILE RODGERS

The Hitmaker behind the Hitmaker

Both the man and his instrument are known by one name: the Hitmaker. And there's a damn good reason for that.

In addition to penning disco floor-fillers with Chic (see *Le Freak* and *Good Times*), N-Rodg has worked his funky magic with David Bowie, Madonna and Diana Ross, as well as popping up on Daft Punk's 2013 earworm smash *Get Lucky*.

Aside from his deft touch and supreme hit-seeking senses, the one common factor is Nile's Hitmaker Strat, dissected by Fender's Custom Shop bods to create the Tribute 'Hitmaker' Stratocaster. Nile has described his original Strat as "the one guitar I can't live without", which makes perfect sense considering the one-of-a-kind traits uncovered during Fender's inspection. "I picked up this Strat and it wound up being the most unique instrument that I've ever touched," Nile explains. "Even though I thought that it was a '59, it was only a '59 neck; it was a '60 body, so it was shielded. My guitar weighs nothing compared to a regular Strat. Had I known any of this stuff, I would have said, 'No, it's not a regular Strat, I don't want that.' But that is what makes it so amazing, because if you listen to my guitar compared to any other Strat, they don't sound the same."

Essential Strat Tone:
Good Times

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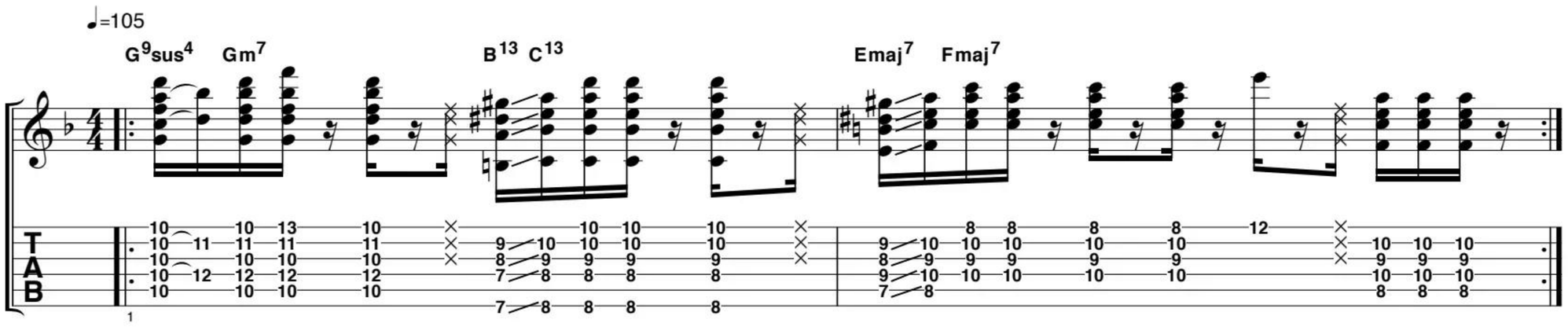
NILE RODGERS RHYTHM

Track 27



The amazing rhythm work of Chic's guitarist and producer Nile Rodgers is living proof that the Strat's neck pickup is great for funk. Use a relaxed, but well-timed, picking motion and target your pick over the neck pickup. A clean sound with stereo reverb will add some sparkle.

Weston-super-Mare's most famous son was a relatively late convert to the Strat

RITCHIE BLACKMORE

The pioneer of neoclassical shred, inspired to pick up a Strat by Jimi

Weston-super-Mare's only bona fide guitar hero, Blackmore did marvellous things with a Strat while blazing a trail through Deep Purple and Rainbow. And that included smashing the beejesus out of them. Neoclassical shred, and the very existence of Yngwie Malmsteen in the guitar world, owe a heavy debt to Blackmore's hands, but his allegiance to the model that he's become synonymous with took a while. Up until *Child In Time,* from the classic 1970 Purple album *In Rock*, Blackmore had used his '61 ES-335 to cut every solo in the studio. But after he saw Hendrix live, he went on the Strat attack with the larger headstock 70s models – often literally: smashing them at the end of shows. But one of his favourites, the 1974 sunburst model he used in one of his finest performances – in Munich with Rainbow in 1977 – at least lasted until 1980, when its headstock was broken off on stage.

Essential Strat Tone: *Black Knight*

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"We stood there motionless, salivating"

JEFF BECK

Exploring parts that other Strat players can't reach

That can't be a standard Strat. Those can't be human hands. He cannot be of this Earth. Such thoughts strike you when you see Jeff Beck in full flight. For Beck, the Strat wasn't just a guitar, but a magic wand that captivated him from childhood. "We stood there motionless, salivating, for at least five minutes," he recalls of his first schoolboy sighting in the window of Jennings Musical Instruments on Charing Cross Road. "We were freaked out."

Of course, every player on this list has dragged the Stratocaster into bold new territories. But when this pickless, peerless master achieved lift-off on his long-running signature model, the instrument has never sounded more like heaven, as with a tickle of the whammy, a swell of the volume pot and a perfectly weighted bend, he created an ethereal swoon like the orgasmic moan of a humpback whale.

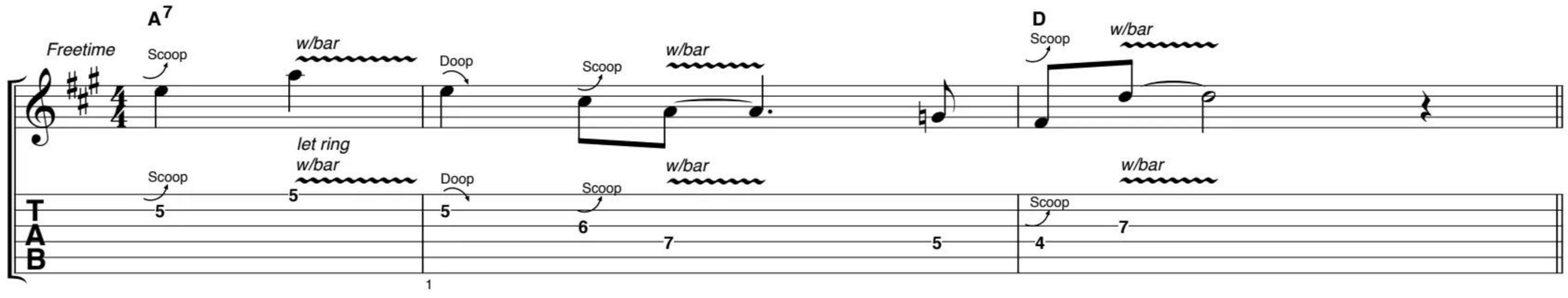
Essential Strat Tone: *Where Were You*

© Tim Mosenfelder/Getty Images

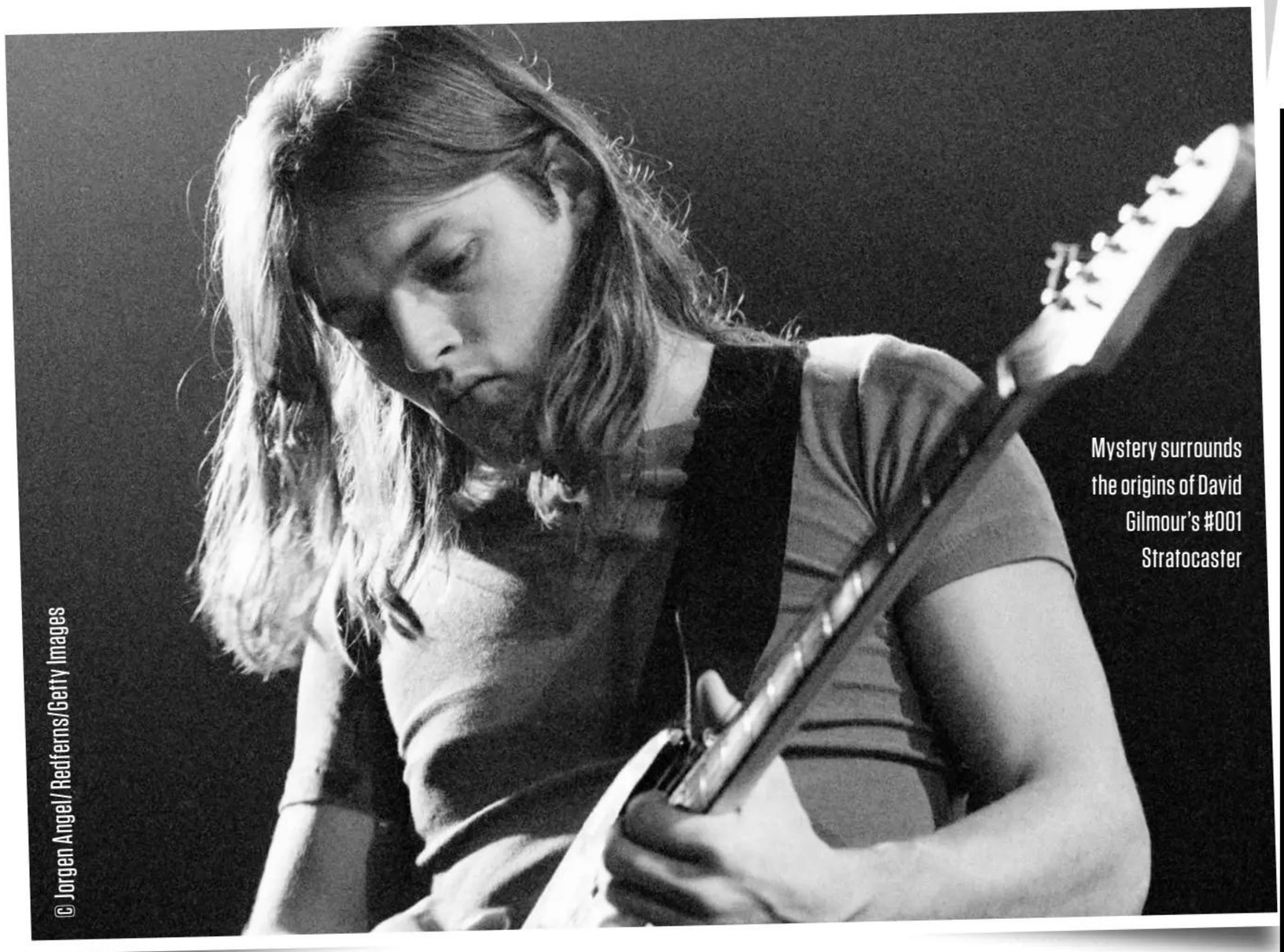
Jeff Beck and the Fender Stratocaster – love at first, lingering schoolboy sight

JEFF BECK SCOOPS AND DOOPS

Track 28



Beck got heavily into Strats in the early 70s. Our lick is perhaps more akin to his 80s style, employing fingerstyle and deft use of the whammy bar to 'scoop' in and 'doop' out of notes. Use a guitar with a two-point floating vibrato or a locking system to help with tuning.



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Mystery surrounds the origins of David Gilmour's #001 Stratocaster

DAVID GILMOUR

The number one Strat fan

A man known not just for what he does with his Strats, but the stories behind them, too. Especially the pièce de résistance of his guitar collection: the #0001 Stratocaster. Understandably with a number like that, there's great interest surrounding the guitar's origins – though it is unlikely to be the first production Strat. It could have been a special presentation model made for an employee when they left Fender. Gilmour purchased the guitar from his long-time tech Phil Taylor in around 1977, though it took some understandable arm-twisting. "Eventually, Phil wanted to borrow some money to buy a house, so I blackmailed him!" David explained. "I said the only way I'd lend him the money to buy the house, was if he sold me the white Strat..."

Guitarist's David Mead examined the guitar in 1986 and suggested it could well be a genuine 1954 model, and it's great that it's still being played by the man himself, rather than a museum piece. Just like Gilmour's far more modded mainstay, late-60s 'Black Strat' (neck now replaced) and his 1983 '57 red reissue. "There's something in the thinness and particular range a Strat has that makes it a Strat," he says of their unique appeal. Leo would be proud.

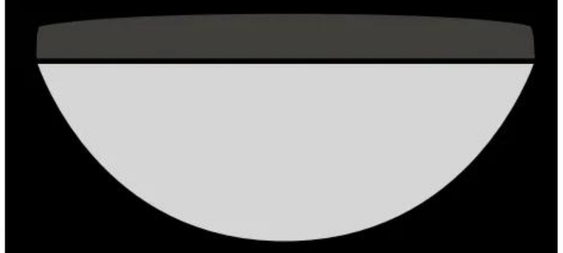
Essential Strat Tone: *Comfortably Numb*

STRAT-OLOGY

KNOW YOUR NECK!

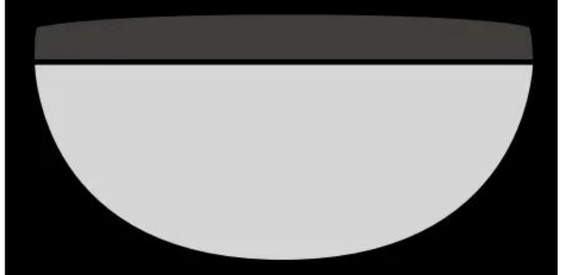
C-SHAPE

The all-rounder. Fender uses its C-shaped profile on many guitars, as it offers a familiar, medium depth and is comfortable for rhythm and lead playing. The modern C-shape offers a shallower, flatter profile, making it the perfect partner for a wider fretboard radius and big string bends.



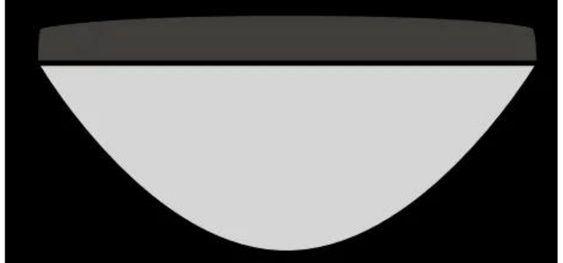
U-SHAPE

This palm-filler is Fender's equivalent to the 'baseball bat'-style neck. It's thicker than a C-shape with a tighter curve, and Fender reckons it suits players who keep their thumb anchored in the back of the neck while playing.



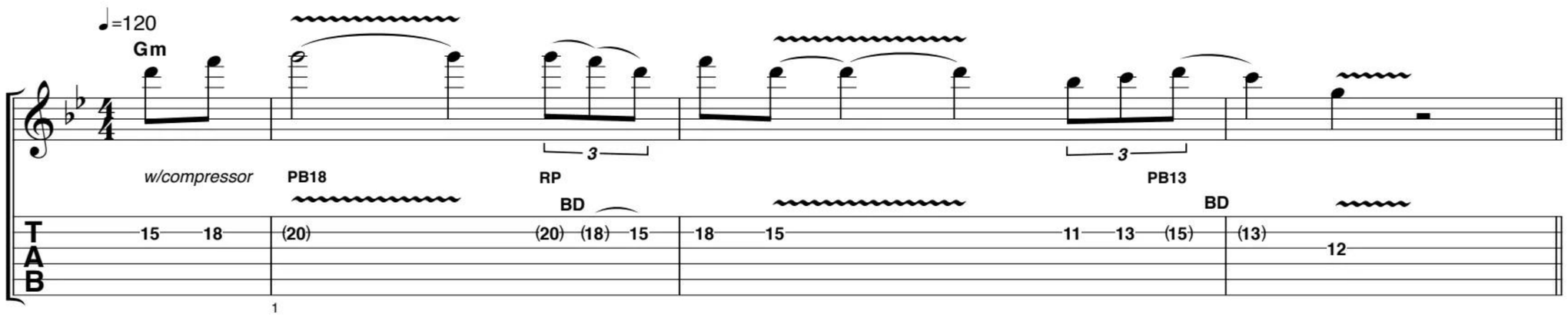
V-SHAPE

The V-shape is perhaps the most divisive of the Big F's profiles. Its vintage vibe means that fans of 50s Strats swear by it. It creates a pronounced hump in your palm, allowing your thumb to comfortably fret notes over the top.



GILMOUR CLEAN LEAD

Track 29



David Gilmour is famous for coaxing silky tones from his black 70s maple-necked Strat. We've used a compressor to bring out the sustain, particularly on the string bends. Add a long delay or a big reverb for authenticity.

STEVIE RAY VAUGHAN

A Strat, a Stetson and soul

The Strat is sometimes cast as the pedestrian choice of the ageing blues superstar. Tell that to SRV. Coming up on the hard-as-nails Texan circuit, the man in the Stetson went to war on his models, stringing them with heavy 0.013 to 0.058s and attacking bends and vibrato with such ferocity that he often had to pause sets to superglue the splits in his fingernails. “I like a lot of different kinds of guitars,” he notes, “but for what I do, it seems a Stratocaster is the most versatile. I can pretty much get any sound out of it.”

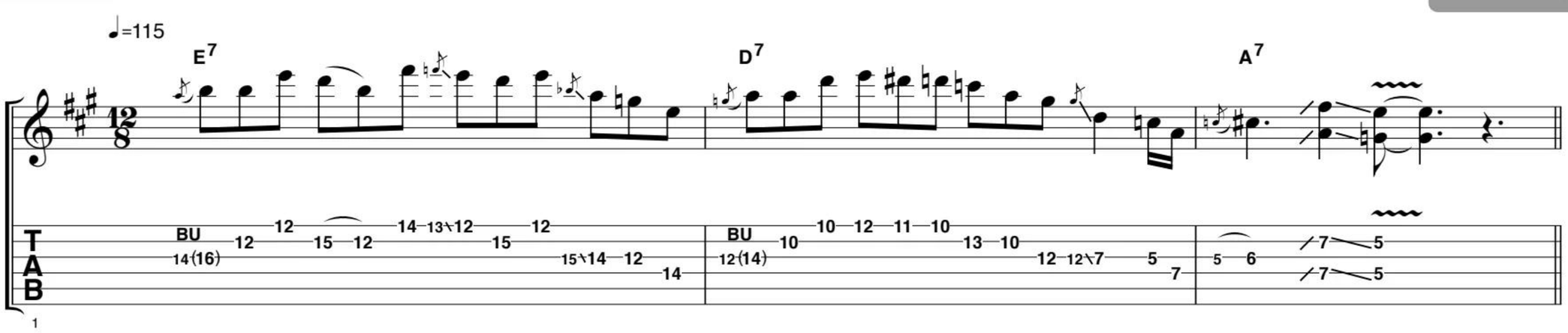
By 1983, *Texas Flood* had made SRV a star, and for the remainder of his career he would rely on two much-loved models that crowds craned their necks for. The ’65, known as Lenny, has the sweetest story, named in honour of SRV’s wife after she blagged the funds to secure it for him. But for gearheads, it’s the Number One hybrid that’s the real treasure, comprising a ’62 body, ’61 V-neck, ’59 pickups and left-handed vibrato.

Tragically, SRV himself never became an ageing blues superstar – he was killed in a helicopter crash in 1990 – but his soul-in-fingers Strat work still inspires and his Fender signature model continues to shift. Hats off.

Essential Strat Tone: *Pride And Joy*

SRV LEAD LICK

Track 30



Stevie Ray Vaughan was fond of the neck pickup sound, and this lick is reminiscent of the way he sometimes navigated a turnaround section. We’ve employed a typical SRV trick of introducing the odd chromatic note (such as F and B♭ in bar 1), which adds colour to a minor pentatonic lick.

© Paul Natkin/Getty Images

ROBERT CRAY

Persuasive Strat tones

Robert Cray unusually opts to have his Strats fitted with hardtail bridges for stability

While the rest of the world got busy butchering their Strats with humbuckers and Floyd Roses, Robert Cray lead the charge for clean, bluesy Stratocaster sounds in the 80s. His funky rhythm style and smooth leads on hits such as *Right Next Door*, *Still Around* and *Smoking Gun* from his breakthrough album *Strong Persuader* cemented his place in blues history. He currently has two 60s-inspired signature Fender Strats, both with hardtails. Chorus pedal is not included.

Essential Strat Tone: *Because Of Me*

© Gijsbert Hanekroot/Redferns/Getty Images

BONNIE RAITT

The queen of bottleneck

She bought it for "$120 at three in the morning in 1969", and Raitt's hybrid 'Brownie' Strat has been key to her weeping slide magic at every show since. Testament to her talent is that she was the first woman to be offered a signature Strat – even if she initially sent Fender packing ("I don't really want to hawk products").

Essential Strat Tone: *Gnawin' On It*

"Even if I was playing air guitar it would be with a Strat!"

Yngwie's Strats have been mercifully obscuring the front of his trousers for decades...

© Richard A. Brooks/AFP/Getty Images

YNGWIE MALMSTEEN

The forceful Strat virtuoso

The neoclassical shred merchant is as synonymous with the Strat as he is groin-grabbing leather trousers. It was 1984's *Rising Force* that brought Yngwie and his 1972 'The Duck' Strat to the forefront of shred-dom, owing to his Paganini-influenced playing and supreme harmonic minor chops. The speedy fretwork was partly down to The Duck's scalloped fretboard, which came about after a chance encounter with a 17th century lute:

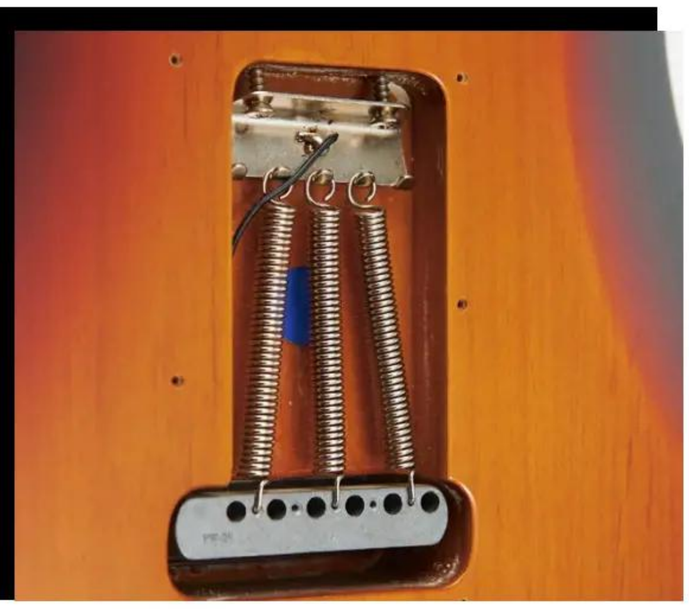
"I was 12 or 13 years old, and I was apprenticing in a luthier shop. I saw a lute that had a scalloped neck, and I was fascinated," Yngwie recalls. "I took a cheapo, piece-of-crap guitar – one of those things you buy from a catalogue – and I made my first scalloped-neck model. It came out great."

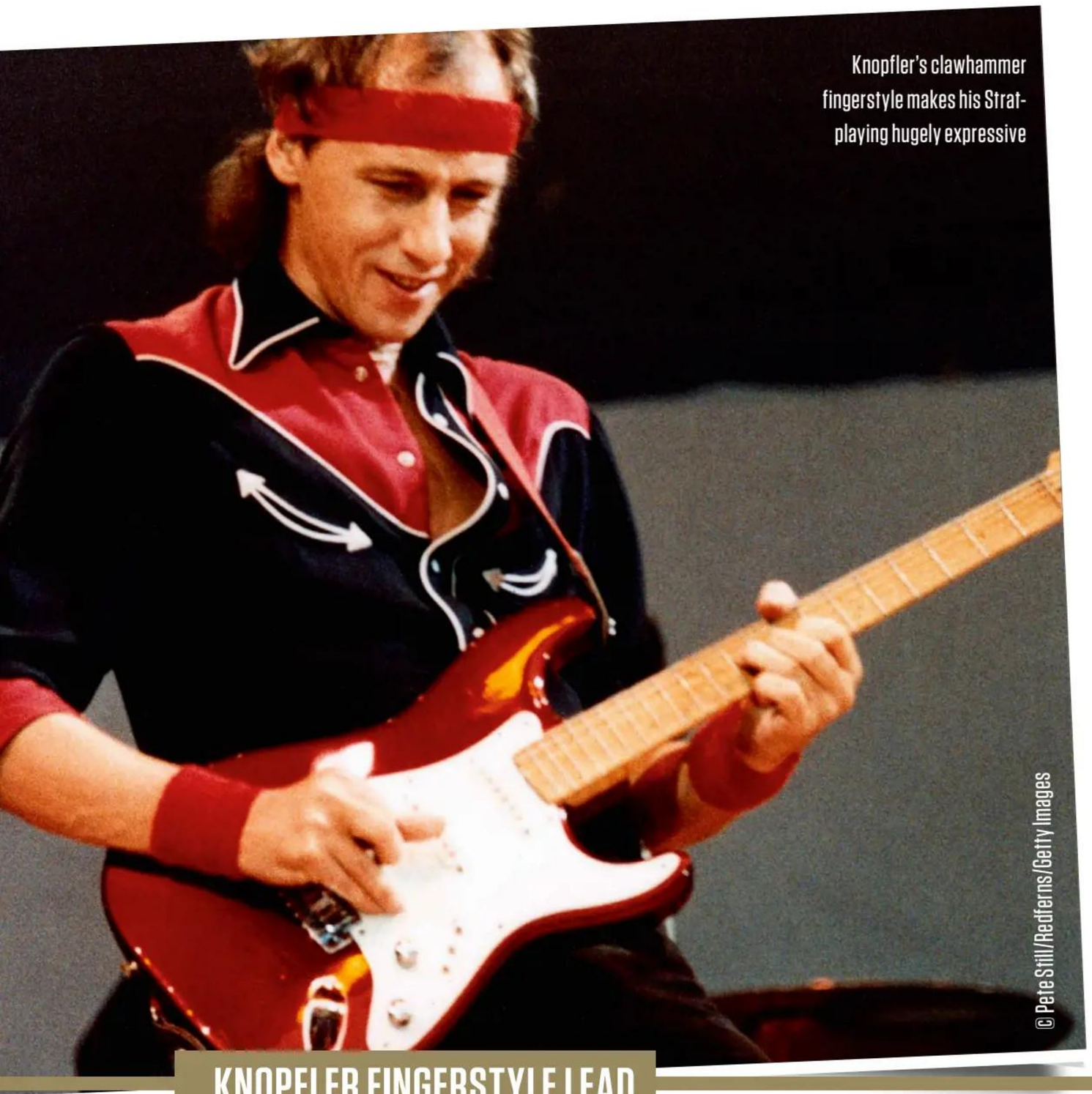
Nowadays, Yngwie is more likely to be found wielding one of his signature Fender axes, but there's still only one model for him. "There's nothing else. A Strat is the guitar for me," he enthuses. "Even if I was playing air guitar, it would be with a Strat!"

Essential Strat Tone: *Rising Force*

TREMOLO (OR, HOW LEO GOT IT WRONG)

Despite not playing the guitar himself, it took Leo Fender just under half a decade to design two all-time classic guitars. Which is why we'll forgive him for creating the biggest misnomer in guitar history at the same time. The incorrect use of the word 'tremolo' was applied to the Strat's vibrato unit – an array of springs and metal based on technology Leo borrowed from his kitchen scales. Originally expecting it to be used for creating shimmering Hawaiian guitar, Leo mistook volume fluctuations (tremolo) for fluttering pitch changes (vibrato). The principle is simple; the bridge pivots on a fulcrum, balanced by the tension of the strings and retaining springs in the back of the guitar. When you depress the bar, you drop the pitch and the springs help to guide them back to their original pitch as you release the pressure. We're sticklers for giving it its true technical name in these pages, but even we'll admit – 'trem' sounds cooler than 'vib'.





Knopfler's clawhammer fingerstyle makes his Strat-playing hugely expressive

© Pete Still/Redferns/Getty Images

MARK KNOPFLER

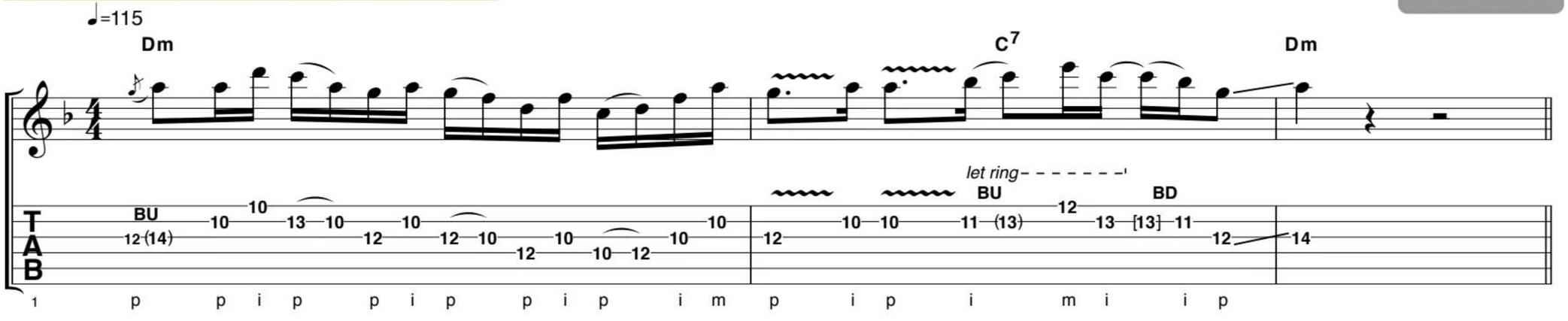
The sultan of strings

Through his playing with Dire Straits, solo material and soundtrack work, the Knopf has made his own mark on the world of guitar – and though he's wielded the odd Tele and Les Paul over the years, it's the Strat with which he made his name on rock staples *Sultans Of Swing*, *So Far Away* and *Walk Of Life*. Hank Marvin was the inspiration behind Mark's own red Strat – and luckily for us, Knopfler got hold of his '61 just in time to record the Straits' debut album in 1978. Part of what makes Mark's Strat sound so distinctive is his fingerstyle approach to the instrument, as well as his heavy use of volume pedals to further control his dynamics. It all adds up to a hugely expressive approach to phrasing, further emphasised by the Strat's trademark glassy tone.

Essential Strat Tone: *Sultans Of Swing*

KNOPFLER FINGERSTYLE LEAD

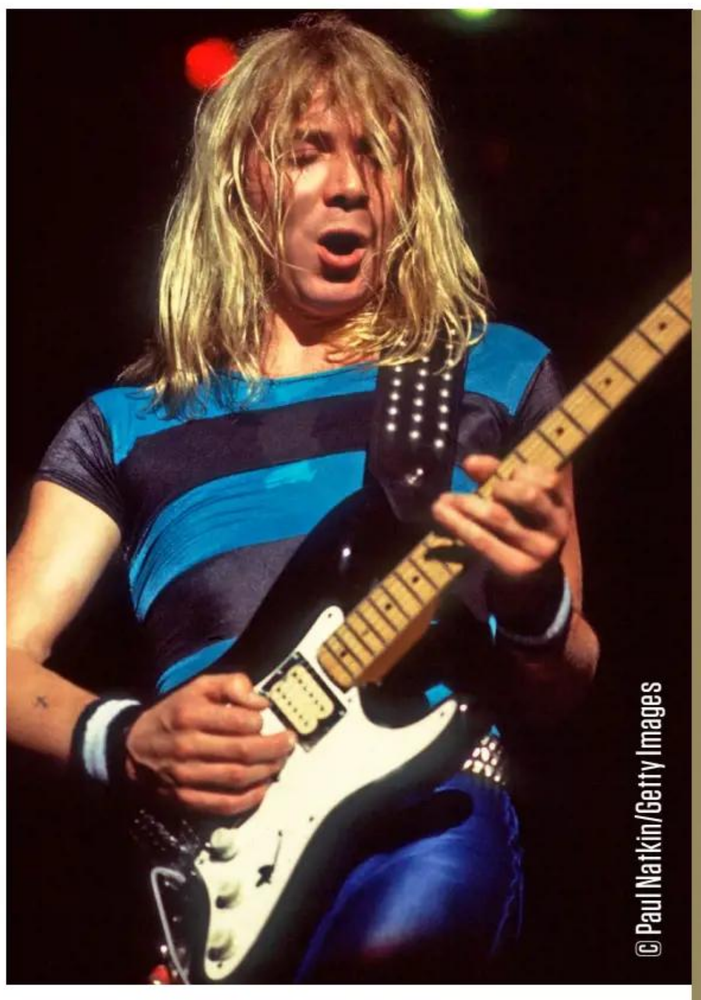
Track 35



This lick is reminiscent of Mark Knopfler's lead work on many early Dire Straits tracks. The most authentic results will come from using a fingerstyle approach, as Mark does. Mark generally picks with his thumb on every eighth note in licks such as this.

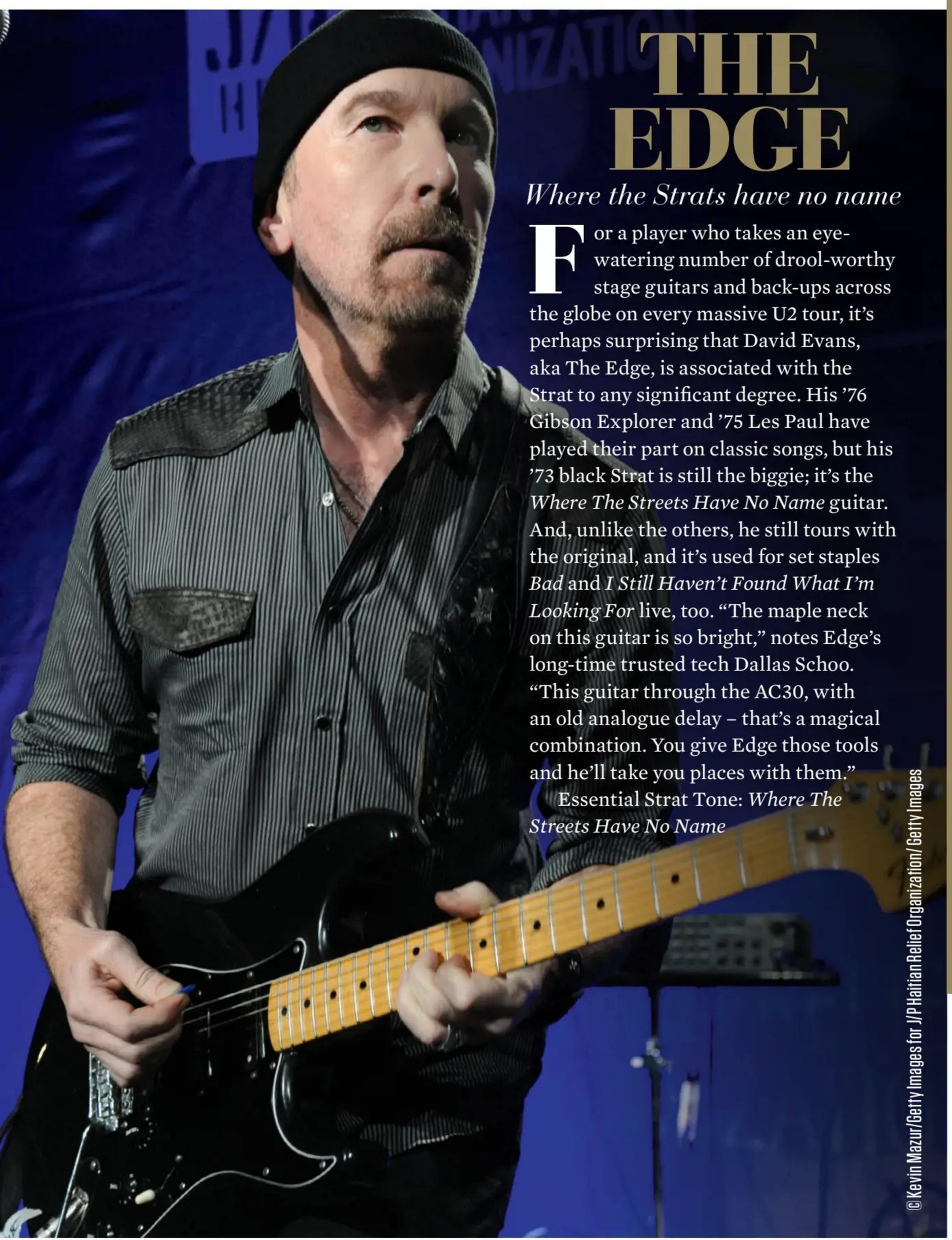
DAVE MURRAY

Maid-on a Strat


© Paul Natkin/Getty Images

The Iron Maiden mainstay's most famous Strat, which he used on the band's first five albums, was actually owned by a guitar hero before him; the '57 was late Free legend Paul Kossoff's (you can see it when it was white on an old *Top Of The Pops* performance of *My Brother Jake*), and Dave Murray purchased it in 1976 after it had been refinished in black. He later had a pair of DiMarzio Super Distortions retrofitted.

Essential Strat Tone: *Run To The Hills*


© Kevin Mazur/Getty Images for J/P Haitian Relief Organization/ Getty Images

THE EDGE

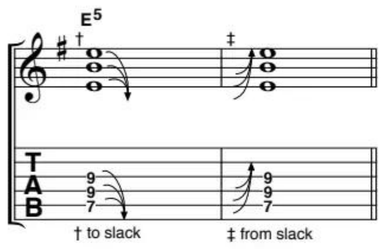
Where the Strats have no name

For a player who takes an eye-watering number of drool-worthy stage guitars and back-ups across the globe on every massive U2 tour, it's perhaps surprising that David Evans, aka The Edge, is associated with the Strat to any significant degree. His '76 Gibson Explorer and '75 Les Paul have played their part on classic songs, but his '73 black Strat is still the biggie; it's the *Where The Streets Have No Name* guitar. And, unlike the others, he still tours with the original, and it's used for set staples *Bad* and *I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For* live, too. "The maple neck on this guitar is so bright," notes Edge's long-time trusted tech Dallas Schoo. "This guitar through the AC30, with an old analogue delay – that's a magical combination. You give Edge those tools and he'll take you places with them."

Essential Strat Tone: *Where The Streets Have No Name*

TIME AT THE BAR... CREATIVE WHAMMY BAR TECHNIQUES

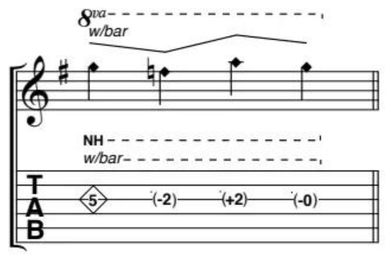
The Strat may not have been the first guitar to come equipped with a vibrato arm (Bigsbys were available in the 40s), but it is arguably the most iconic. Although some Strat players prefer their bridge 'decked' (set flat against the body), we recommend getting your vibrato system set up with a little movement so you can try out a few creative whammy bar techniques.



Track 31

1 DIVEBOMB AND REVERSE DIVEBOMB

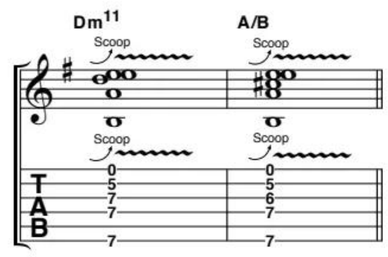
To perform a divebomb, simply play a chord and dip the bar so the strings go slack, giving an explosion-like sound effect. A reverse divebomb means starting from slack and gradually raising the bar to give a sense of growing and getting bigger.



Track 32

2 WHAMMY BAR MELODY

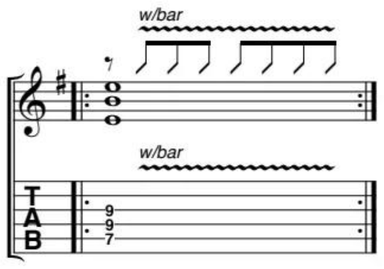
Here, we've used the vibrato to play a melody. Our Strat's setup allows us to pull the bar upwards to raise the pitch by a tone, but this isn't necessarily the limit. On *The Attitude Song*, Steve Vai plays a two-tone shift using a Floyd Rose vibrato.



Track 33

3 SCOOPING INTO CHORDS

This is an atmospheric idea that uses the vibrato to 'scoop' into a chord. Simply dip the bar a touch as you strum. Make the most of the technique by raking your pick across the strings and adding gentle bar vibrato as the chord rings out.



Track 34

4 RHYTHMIC PULSING

This is a textural rhythm effect, played by gently tapping either the bridge or the bar itself. For our example, we've played a straight eighth-note pulse on a chord, but you could experiment with your own different rhythmic ideas.

JOHN FRUSCIANTE

He can't stop playing Strats…

During his initial tenure as Red Hot Chili Peppers axeman, Frusciante became a contemporary Strat icon thanks to a rich vocabulary of Hendrix-inspired chordal embellishments and fiery solos. But while John's first contributions can be heard on 1989's *Mother's Milk*, it wasn't until *Blood Sugar Sex Magik* that his signature clean, compressed lines made their mark, most notably on riffy funkathon *Give It Away* and addiction ballad *Under The Bridge*.

Although funk was no longer the Chilis' primary concern following Frusciante's return in 1998, there are still plenty of stand-out Strat moments later on in the band's career, from *Scar Tissue*'s sparse hybrid-picked intro to the snappy riffs of *Can't Stop* and the Jimi-channelling solo in *Dani California* – John's solo work, such as 2009's *The Empyrean*, has its fair share of psychedelic Strat attacks, too.

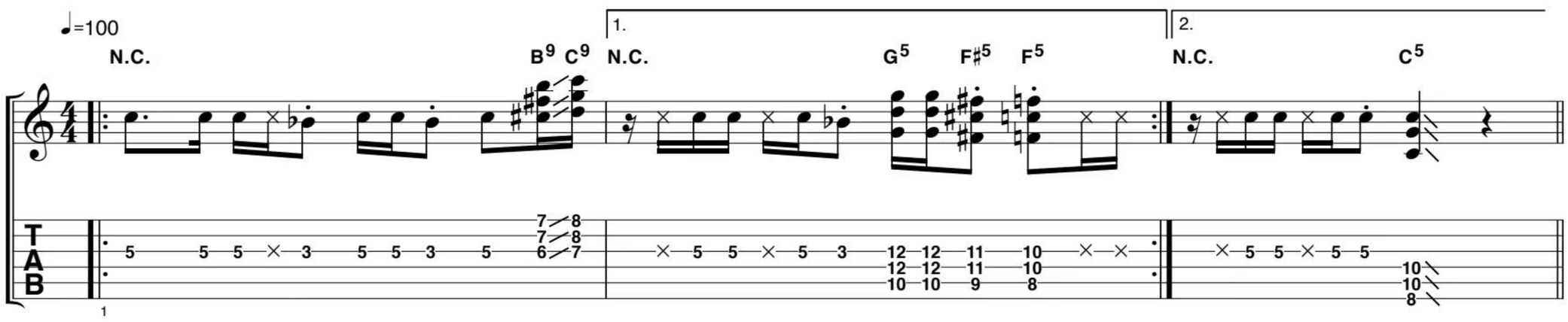
Frusciante is famed for his collection of endlessly desirable guitars, but none more so than his Strats – John's favourite is an original '62 sunburst, but he also owns '55 sunburst and '61 Fiesta Red models, fitted with Seymour Duncan SSL-1 pickups. We're not jealous, honest.

Essential Strat Tone: *Under The Bridge*

© Jun Sato/WireImage/Getty Image

FRUSCIANTE FUNK/ROCK RIFF

Track 36



Chili Peppers funk-rock master John Frusciante is often pictured playing a beaten-up old Sunburst 60s Strat. Our example is a funky little ditty, reminiscent of some of his earlier work with the band. A clean, punchy Fender amp tone will bring the lick to life.

TOM MORELLO

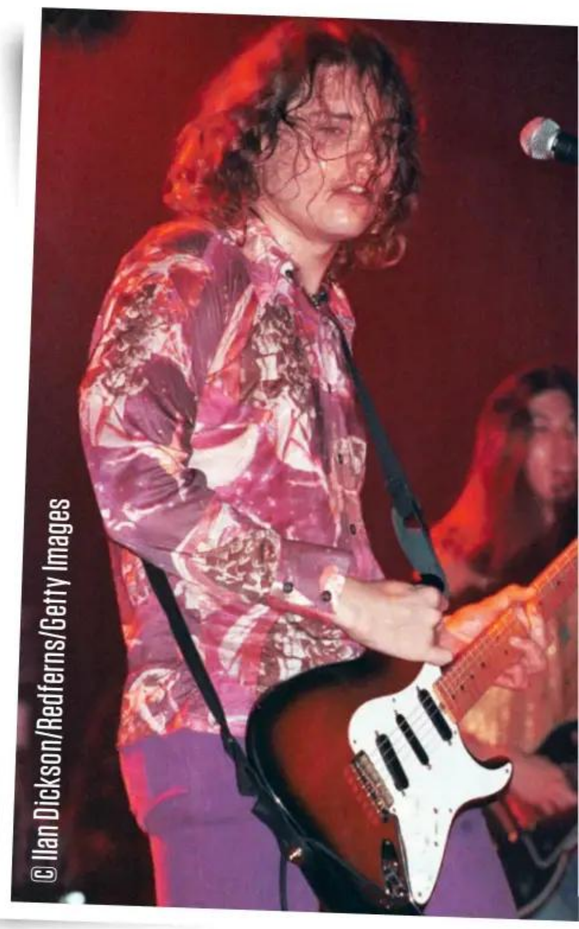
Killswitching in the name

Although most famous for his 'Arm The Homeless' mongrel axe, Morello also rocked the hell out of his 'Soul Power' Strat during Audioslave's incredible seven-year career. A stock FSR Strat, modified with a Floyd Rose and killswitch, the Soul Power fuelled a wealth of 'slave riff-fests, including monster singles *Cochise*, *Like A Stone* and *Your Time Has Come*.

Essential Strat Tone: *Cochise*

BILLY CORGAN

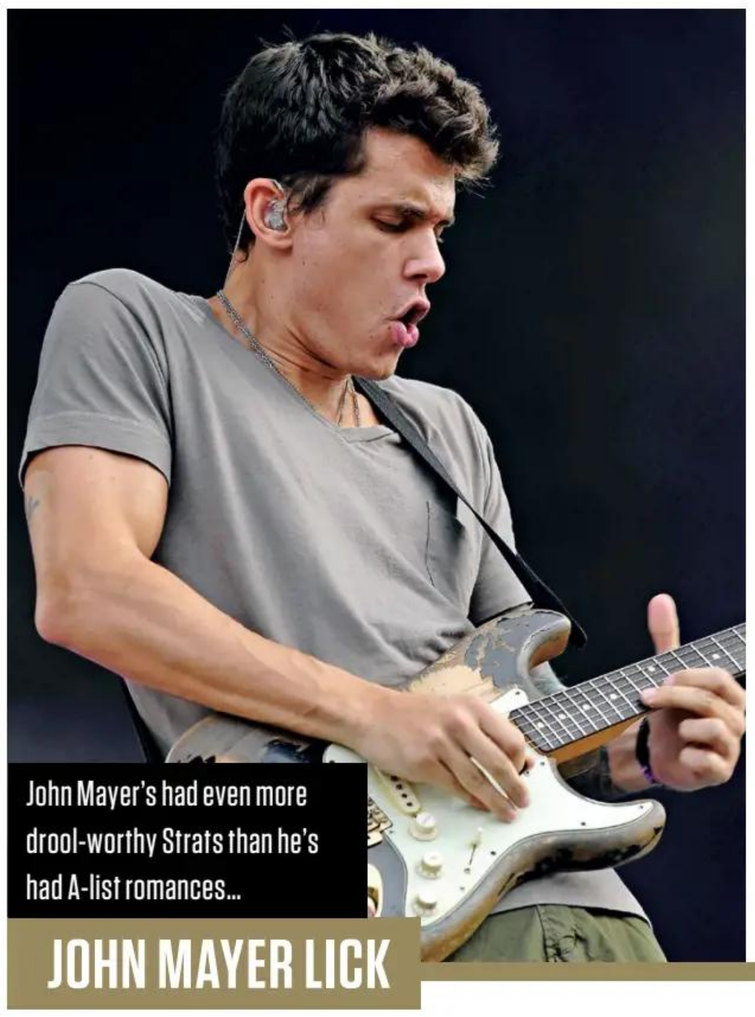
The infinite Strat-ness


© Ilan Dickson/Redferns/Getty Images

The 90s saw a new slew of guitar heroes emerge from the US, but only one was loyal to the Strat. "It was never a choice of, like, yeah, I want to play a Stratocaster," Corgan said in an interview with Fender. "I just got one, and when I played it, it suddenly brought alive what I was looking for in music."

The versatility of Corgan's back catalogue is a testament to the Strat's own adaptability, and in 2008 he was awarded his own signature guitar, modelled after his first Strat – a 1973 model.

Essential Strat Tone: *Cherub Rock*


John Mayer's had even more drool-worthy Strats than he's had A-list romances...

JOHN MAYER

In your Strat-mosphere

With chops evoking the spirit of Hendrix and SRV and boutique tone to match, John Mayer is a true modern guitar hero, and he achieved it all with the help of the Fender Stratocaster.

John has a large collection of Strats, including his sunburst SRV signature model, the iconic battered 'Black 1', and a host of Jimi-inspired guitars.

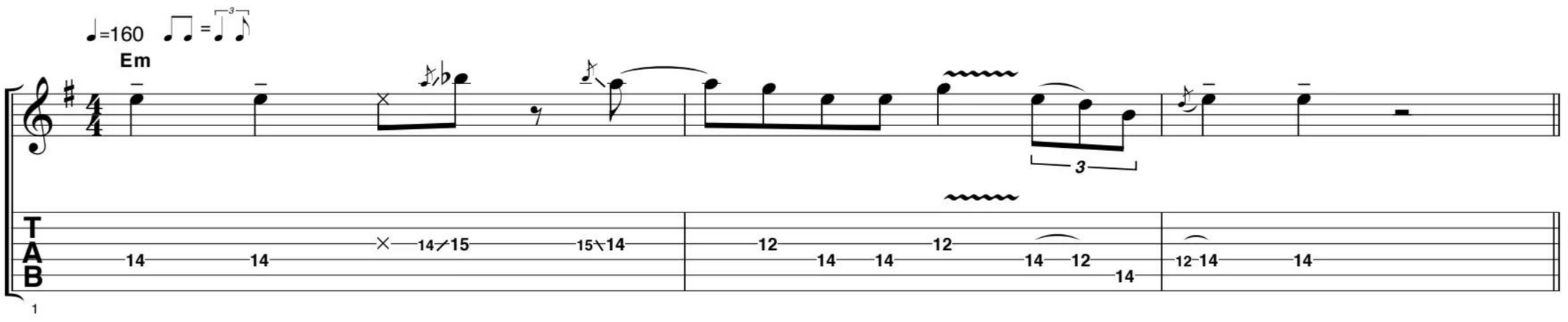
"I have a prototype 1979 Hendrix Tribute Strat – white with a reverse headstock, with a contour on the front – and a prototype Hendrix Monterey Strat that [artist] Pamelina painted in 1997. I love prototypes! I have a '68 Strat, black, big headstock, classic Band Of Gypsys, and I have a '69 Olympic White Strat with maple cap neck, which is the Woodstock Strat."

The John Mayer Stratocaster has some unique features: string trees placed towards the end of the headstock to allow for more leverage when bending behind the nut, a thick C-shaped neck, and, perhaps most crucially, John's 'Big Dipper' pickups. These have a scooped midrange, further accenting John's Fender-ish tone

Essential Strat Tone: *Vultures*

JOHN MAYER LICK

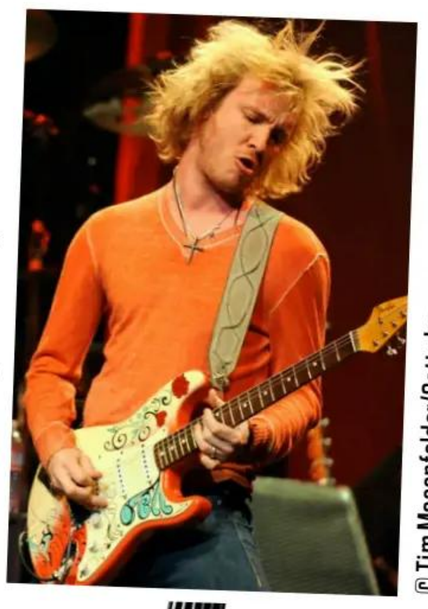
Track 37



John Mayer is an exciting Strat player from the SRV school, so the neck pickup is featured regularly in his playing. This lick is all about hitting the strings hard with your pick and making sure your string muting is good. Dial in a clean sound with plenty of headroom.

KENNY WAYNE SHEPHERD

The spirit of '61



© Tim Mosenfelder/Getty Images

One of the key bluesmen of the post-SRV period, Kenny Wayne is a Strat man through and through, like his idol. A prodigious talent, he found his holy grail guitar at the age of 16 when he and his father visited Los Angeles and spied the '61 sunburst Strat he fell for. Kenny returned a year later to buy it and it's barely left his side.

Essential Strat Tone:
King's Highway

Simon Neil uses an array of pedals to make his Strat sound absolutely massive

© Tim Mosenfelder/Getty Images

ALEX TURNER

Pluck it and see

"We're Arctic Monkeys... Don't believe the hype." These are the words Alex Turner spoke in the live video for *I Bet You Look Good On The Dancefloor*. Within weeks, Turner, his band and his fittingly Arctic White Standard Strat had rocketed to the top of the charts, clocking up the fastest-selling debut album in UK history. Often preferring 50s-style maple necks using the bridge pickup, Alex and his Strat tones have reinvigorated the spiky sound of indie-rock guitars, incorporating punk, 50s-inspired twang and surf, even drop-tuned riffing. These days, Alex tends to flit between Fender Broncos, Les Pauls and various Gretches, but it all started with the Strat!

Essential Strat Tone:
Fake Tales Of San Francisco

SIMON NEIL

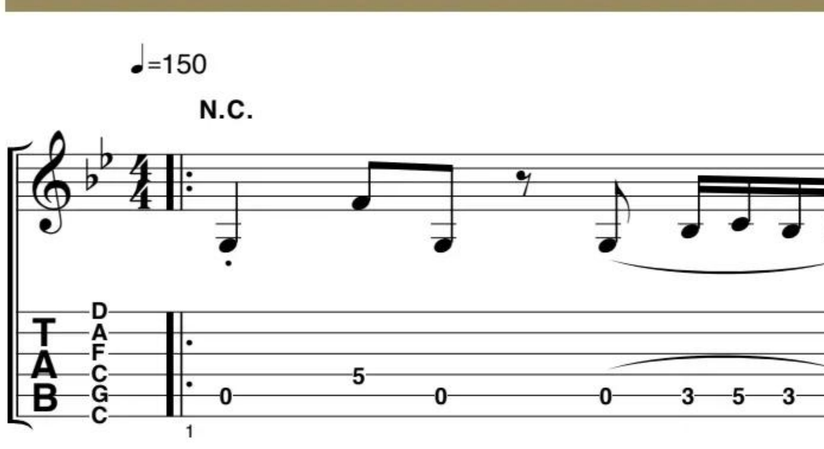
The Captain of modern Strat-rockers

If it felt as if the Tele had been lording it over its younger brother in the 2000s, that's probably because the Strat seemed to have fallen out of favour with modern indie bands. Except, that is, one of the biggest British breakthroughs of the last 20 years. Biffy Clyro's Simon Neil even goes as far as reviving Hank Marvin's Fiesta Red finish on his Strats, which create the massive tones that have made Biffy such a live force. "You need a big loud guitar sound to make a Strat sound full and heavy," he says, "as it's naturally very bright and undistorted, bright and jangly. I run it through my pedals of doom and try to make it sound like a volcano erupting! I love the shape of a Strat, too, I feel so comfortable with it." Fittingly, Simon was awarded with his own Squier signature model in 2010. "My very first guitar was a Squier, so it's come full circle," he tells us.

Essential Strat Tone:
Get Fucked Stud

SIMON NEIL'S DROP-TUNED ANGULAR RIFFING

Track 38



Simon Neil has used his Strat to produce Biffy Clyro's signature aggressive down-tuned riffing style. There's an angular feel to our riff, thanks to onbeat rests and offbeat notes, so timing is crucial. One-finger powerchords are a key part of the Biffy sound.

This year's essential read for any guitar player or collector

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STRATO-MASTER

As The Shadows' King Of Twang, Hank Marvin was Britain's first guitar hero of the electric era, inspiring a generation of players with single-coil tones as springy and lush as a manicured lawn – but he also played the first Fender Stratocaster to reach these shores. We join Hank to hear previously unrevealed details of the Strats that he used to carve out his inimitable sound…

Few Strat players are as iconic as Hank Marvin – it's hard to picture him without also seeing in your mind's eye a Fiesta Red Strat with a maple fingerboard and gold-plated fittings, the guitar with which he made his name in The Shadows. It's a guitar that seemed electrifyingly modern in drab, post-war Britain, and in fact, it was the first example of Leo Fender's contoured masterpiece to enter the country. It's testament to the Strat's adaptability that Hank's still relying on the design decades later – and over the years, several other Strats have passed through the hands of this hugely influential player. We chatted with Hank about the 'significant other' Strats he's used on landmark recordings, plus detailed insights into the Strat setup and component mods that he favours…

PHOTO BY CHRIS BARHAM/DAILY MAIL/REX/SHUTTERSTOCK

SO, THAT FIRST FIESTA RED STRAT. HOW DID YOU COME BY IT?

"That first Strat made an appearance in 1959. My Antoria had a horribly bent neck, so Cliff wanted to buy me a good guitar, and we decided that the Fender was the way to go, because we'd seen Buddy Holly with one on the Crickets album cover, and it was pretty cool. It was great looking and we liked the sound of it, and we'd heard that James Burton used a Fender, so we got a catalogue from the States. We could see that Buddy's guitar was the Stratocaster and as that was their top-of-the-range model, we assumed that James Burton would also have one. For some reason, we always thought it was called Flamingo Pink. But apparently they never had any such colour; it was Fiesta Red. Anyway, we ordered that in what was pretty much the top-of-the-range specification."

ITS ARRIVAL MUST HAVE BEEN EXCITING?

"Very! It came in a tweed Fender case with the red plush lining and this magnificent-looking thing was just lying inside. It was like something from space, really, it was so futuristic in its design. The three pickups, the white scratchplate, the red guitar, the beautiful birdseye maple neck and all the gold plating, it just looked sensational. We just looked at it for a while, then took it out of the case, tuned it up and played it. Unfortunately, the strings were really heavy; I was told back in the 70s that they were sent out then with 0.013 to 0.056 gauge or something like that, with a 0.026 wound third, so they were much heavier than I was used to. I found it difficult to adjust to the effort."

SO DID YOU HAVE TO ADAPT YOUR STYLE OF PLAYING AS A RESULT?

"Undoubtedly – but the tremolo arm was great, because I found it helped me in different ways. The second string you could bend but probably only half a step, but I could bend it up with my

Cliff Richard and The Shadows pose with their instruments c.1987

PICTORIAL PRESS LTD / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

left hand and pull it up a bit more with the whammy bar. The other thing was I could get vibrato on the strings, which I've always enjoyed in other instruments, to make it sort of say more. I could hit a note and dip it down or hit it under pitch and let it come up, just little things – and, of course, I loved giving it a good old shake. You know that trick where you push the second string up against the first and give the bar this wild shake, like the beginning of *Man Of Mystery*? Things like that were fun to do, and they were different. So, clearly, the guitar itself and the fact that it had the vibrato bar helped me to develop a style that wouldn't have happened without that.

"Also, the guitar itself, the sound, the shape of it with the contoured body was very comfortable, and it's not a heavy instrument. So therefore you could swing it around a little bit for posing and leaping about. It lent itself very much to the visual aspect of rock 'n' roll."

SO WHAT WAS THE FIRST RECORDING SESSION YOU USED IT ON?

"I'm not sure about that. *Saturday Dance* [from August 1959] has the Strat on it, and I used it on Cliff's second album [*Cliff Sings*]. We did things like *The Snake And The Bookworm*, but I don't remember which came first, that album or *Travellin' Light*."

IS IT TRUE THAT THE VIBRATO ARM WAS PARTICULARLY SHORT?

"Well, I didn't have anything initially to compare it with, but I noticed that some of the Strats I had later seemed to have longer arms. So I would say that it was shorter. It would be interesting to compare photographs."

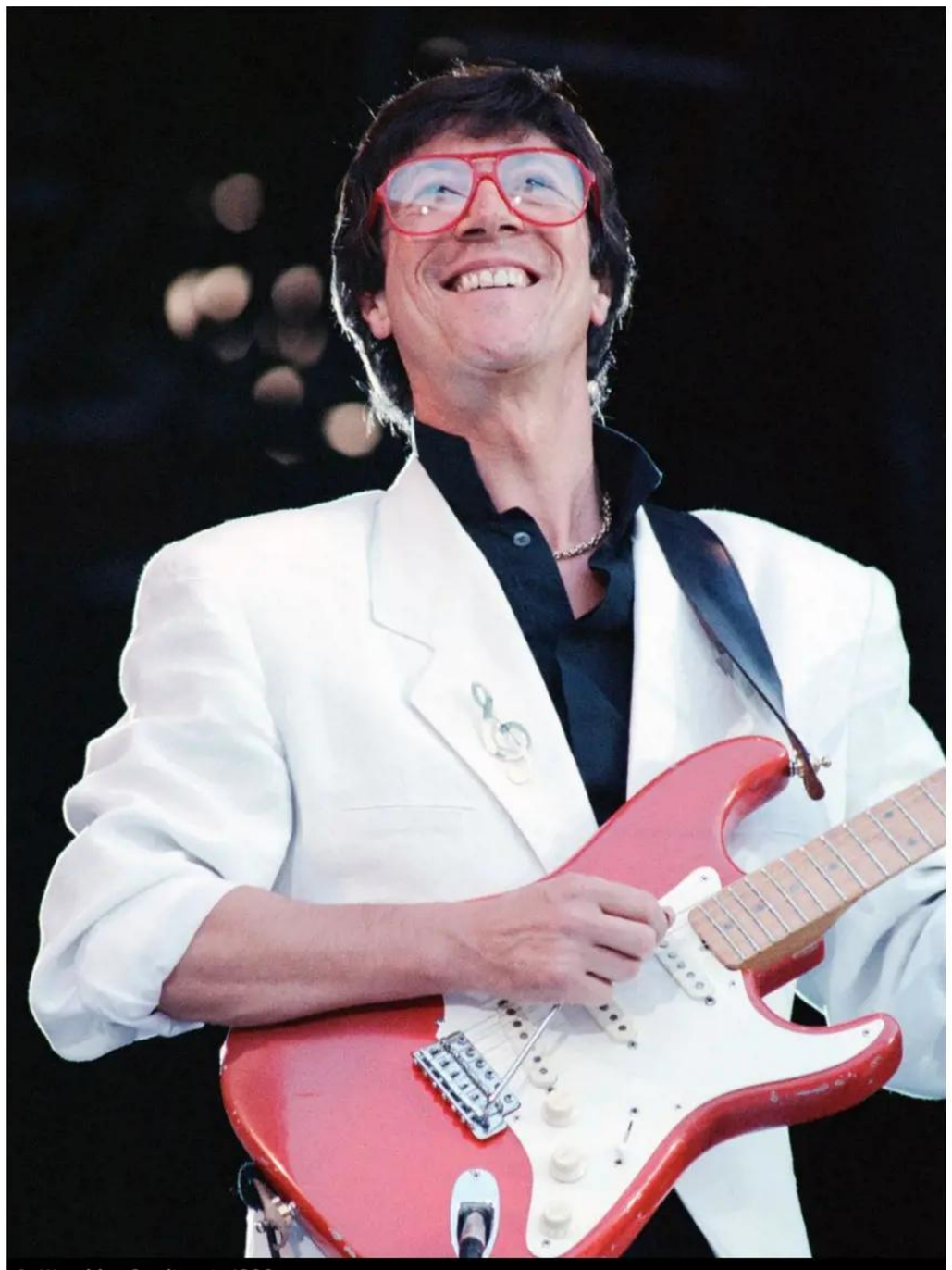
"You could swing it around a bit for posing and leaping about. It lent itself to the visual aspect of rock 'n' roll"

THAT PARTICULAR GUITAR WENT BACK TO CLIFF, AND HE HAD IT SPRAYED WHITE FOR A WHILE?

"Yeah, well, when Jennings [Vox's manufacturers] became the importers of Fender equipment once the trade embargo was lifted, they wanted us to use Fenders. Initially, I still had that first guitar, so Bruce [Welch] and Jet [Harris] got the Jazzmaster and Precision Bass. Then they said we could have red Strats and a bass, and we thought, 'Great, that would be a good look.' They gave me one as well with a rosewood fingerboard, so the original went back to Cliff. That would have been 1961, and I think we had them sprayed white for a while. I know we had white Burns guitars, but before that, we had white Fenders during the time that Licorice [Brian Locking] was playing bass. We didn't have the red ones as well, so I think they took them back and sprayed them for us. Cliff liked the look of them, so he said, 'I'll get this one sprayed white, so when we're working together and I use it, it'll look really cool'."

WHAT WERE THE FIRST RECORDINGS THE ROSEWOOD STRAT WAS ON?

"The first session? That's a good question, but I can't remember! When we did the *Crackerjack* TV show playing *The Frightened City* and *FBI* [in late April 1961] we had those guitars, but we



At Wembley Stadium in 1989

TRINITY MIRROR / MIRRORPIX / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

A promo shot of The Shadows in 1961

PICTORIAL PRESS LTD / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

didn't necessarily record and release things immediately. It could have been two weeks later, or a track could have been sitting around for months."

SO WHICH DID YOU PREFER AT THE TIME, THE MAPLE-NECK STRAT OR THE ROSEWOOD 'BOARD?

"I preferred the maple neck; it was a better guitar, I thought, with a particularly good sound. When I got the rosewood 'board, it just sounded a bit different to me. And I just preferred the feel of that original guitar, which was a particularly nice instrument with a nice fingerboard."

DID YOU GET A CHOICE OF THE GUITARS THAT JENNINGS SUPPLIED?

"No, they would just send them over. We just thought a Strat's a Strat, and if there was a problem they would obviously fix it – you know, rough frets or anything like that. But we didn't get to choose them ourselves; they picked out two guitars and a bass for us. There were at least two, maybe three sets going through from then until 1963. They replaced them as necessary. We did get newer guitars as ours got a bit bashed or whatever, and they'd take those back and do whatever they do with them, probably renovated and sold them, I guess."

AS YOU PREFERRED THE FEEL, WHY DIDN'T YOU GO BACK TO AN ALL-MAPLE NECK?

"Well, I asked and they said they couldn't get the maple necks. Whether Fender had stopped making them at that point I've really no idea, but that's the story we were told and accepted."

HOW MUCH OF A PROBLEM WAS NOISE IN THE EARLY DAYS?

"It depended on the venue, particularly when they used the dimmers on the lights, as that seemed to affect the noise tremendously – it was really 'frying tonight'. Once you were all playing, it wasn't really that noticeable, but back then, people's sound-quality expectations weren't what they are now."

SO ARE YOU STILL FAVOURING KINMAN PICKUPS ON THE STRATOCASTERS THAT YOU USE TODAY?

"When we did the remake of all the old numbers for the Cliff and The Shads reunion album, I decided to try out some of the Fender '57 reissues, which I was introduced to when trying out the TVS3 echo. I thought it might be an idea to go back to the kind of pickups on the older guitars to get the sort of sound that we were trying to recreate. I had those fitted on all the guitars for the album, and they're still on! They sound really good. They have a nice twang to them, and although they're not as quiet as the Kinmans, they're not as bad as they used to be."

WHY DID YOU DECIDE TO SWITCH BACK TO FENDER GUITARS FROM BURNS INSTRUMENTS AFTER MARVIN, WELCH & FARRAR REVERTED TO BEING THE SHADOWS?

"Well, I'd already gone back to Fenders by then. When Marvin, Welch & Farrar were doing the Palladium with Cliff and Olivia Newton John, I had several guitars stolen – two Burns, a 12-string Gibson and an acoustic six-string – on the night before we opened. Bruce had lent Cliff's [now white] Strat to Terry Britten, who was in Cliff's band at the time, so he got it back for

Hank being filmed for *The Young Ones* and using his rosewood-'board Strat

PHOTO BY WEBB/REX/SHUTTERSTOCK

Bruce Welch (right) holds the notorious humbucking Strat from the 1970s

PHOTO BY LARRY ELLIS/EXPRESS/HULTON ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES

Hank playing 'Miss Daisy', the pre-production 1954 Strat belonging to Jean-Pierre Danel (right)

SABINE CROSSEN/PUZZLE PRODUCTIONS, PUBLIC DOMAIN, VIA WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

me. I used it for the time we were there, then I decided, 'Yeah, I love it, I'm back on to the Strat!' So that's when I bought the sunburst one, or one with that terrible colour that looked like an undercoat, but anyway, I bought a Strat. I should have kept hold of Cliff's one!"

DURING THE TIME THAT YOU WERE WORKING WITH JOHN FARRAR, THERE WAS A SUNBURST STRAT WITH A MAPLE 'BOARD AND LARGE HEADSTOCK AND A MUCH-MODIFIED WHITE ONE...

"I had a black one! But, from memory, I had that sprayed at least once so that was probably the sunburst one that I decided to have black, eventually with a tortoiseshell pickguard. I tried different pickups, too. I had a Fender humbucker on the bridge and something else on the front, a Gibson humbucker, I think, and a single coil. Actually, I still have that scratchplate in the studio with the pickups attached. I saw a black Telecaster in a guitar store in Manchester and thought it looked really sharp, so I decided to do it black, and I had it for a few years until I gave it to Ben Marvin."

DO YOU HAVE ANY WIRING MODS DONE TO YOUR STRATS?

"Well, a few extra switches in the days when you tried to get those in-between pickups sounds, but I think that was on the one with the humbuckers. On one of my signature models, I've got a pull-push switch on the lower tone control knob that does something, although I'm not sure what, as I've never used it! I think it engages the neck and bridge pickup together, and I think that's why I had it done. That's quite an interesting sound, and I'm pretty sure I used that on a couple of my early album tracks, although it doesn't figure very highly on my Richter scale of pickup choices – but you've just reminded me that maybe I should look at that again. I do use that between-pickups sound sometimes, just for a tone colour change, but usually, I use the pickups individually – and more often than not, I end up on the bridge pickup."

DO YOU STILL HAVE EASY-MUTE VIBRATO ARMS ON YOUR STRATS?

"Yes, I do, along with the block that Ian St John White does that matches the actual bar. The material it's made of stops the bar working loose like the standard arm tends to do. We've all tried tape and loads of things to stop that rattle, but these never do that, they're brilliant."

LET'S BE HONEST, THERE WASN'T ACTUALLY MUCH WRONG WITH THE ORIGINAL 1954 DESIGN, WAS THERE?

"No, not at all! I've seen a '54 belonging to a friend of mine in France, Jean-Pierre Danel, who's got one that he calls 'Miss Daisy', and it's very nice. Whew! Great design – looked great, comfortable to play... they got it right first time!"

IT'S TOTALLY FUNCTIONAL, BEAUTIFUL AND ICONIC AT THE SAME TIME...

"Absolutely! And it's a very practical instrument, too. They're as tough as old nails and you've got a variety of sounds available. I've seen people playing jazz on them; you can play country on them, blues, rock, heavy rock and everything you can think of, really. I think it's an incredibly versatile guitar."

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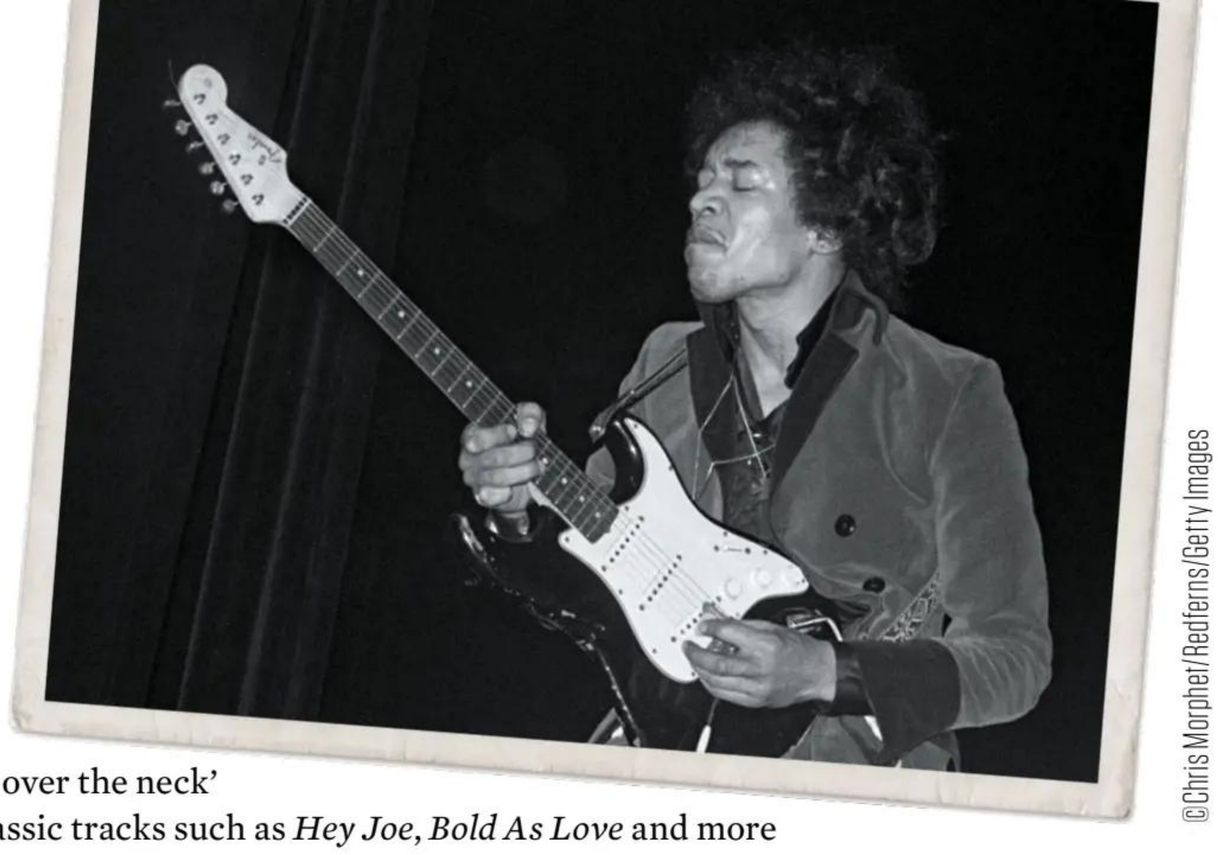
THE GUITAR MASTERY OF JIMI HENDRIX

It goes without saying that Jimi Hendrix is one of the most important guitar players in history – but he's also one of the most influential. In addition to the groundbreaking genius of his music, his playing style has inspired scores of guitarists of every genre since, many of whom have achieved legend status in their own right – think of Edward Van Halen, Joe Satriani, Kirk Hammett and Ritchie Blackmore, to name just a few

We have already taken a brief look at Jimi Hendrix's playing approach (see page 94), but now we go deep into his style and show you some of the key elements of his playing that you can use to improve your own technique, as generations of guitarists have done from every corner of the electric guitar's broad church. So deep is Hendrix's influence on modern guitar playing, you may already use some of these techniques without even knowing, but such is Jimi's genius, there's probably a few you don't, too – his style really does contain something for everyone. We're kicking off with a look at Jimi's rhythm playing and his 'thumb over the neck' fretting technique, which forms the basis for most of his technique. Turn the page to get the Jimi Hendrix experience and don't forget to try these techniques out on your own Strat!

JIMI'S CLEAN RHYTHM STYLE

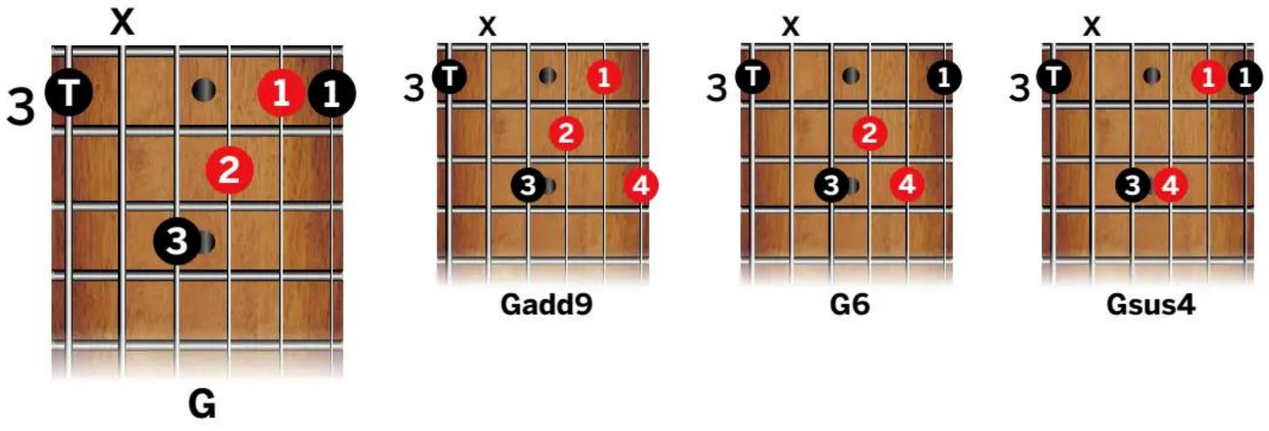


©Chris Morphet/Redferns/Getty Images

It all starts here! Get to grips with the basics of Jimi's 'thumb over the neck' and one-finger barre techniques and soon you'll be playing classic tracks such as *Hey Joe*, *Bold As Love* and more

THUMB OVER THE NECK BARRE CHORDS

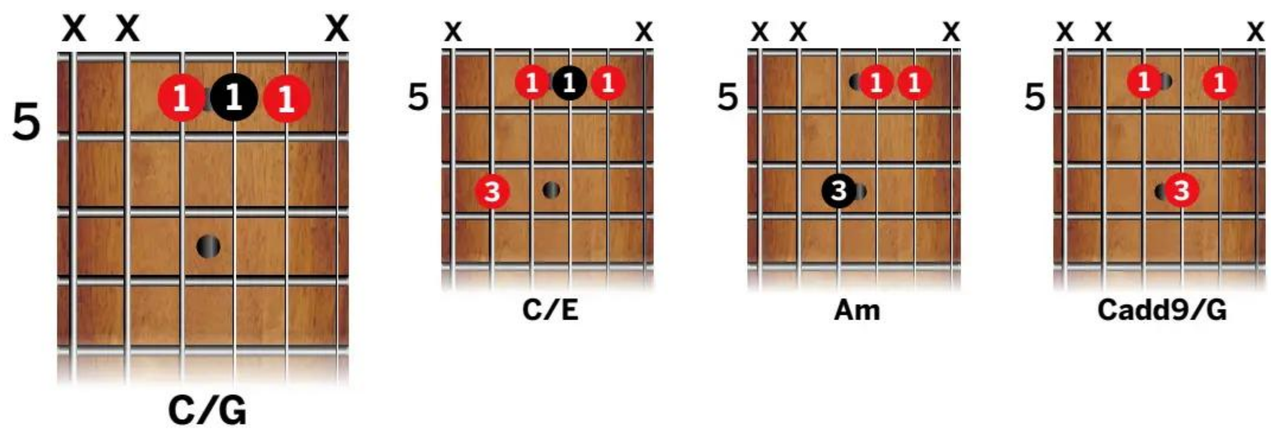
Track 15



Classical guitarists may balk, but Jimi's 'thumb over the neck' barre chord technique allows him to position his fret hand in a way that those magical chord embellishments fall neatly under his fingers. It's just a matter of wrapping your thumb round the neck to fret the sixth string instead of using your first finger to barre across all six strings. Try the basic G chord first, and hammer on to the extra notes for a *Little Wing* or *Castles Made Of Sand* vibe.

FIRST-FINGER BARRE CHORD SHAPE

Track 16

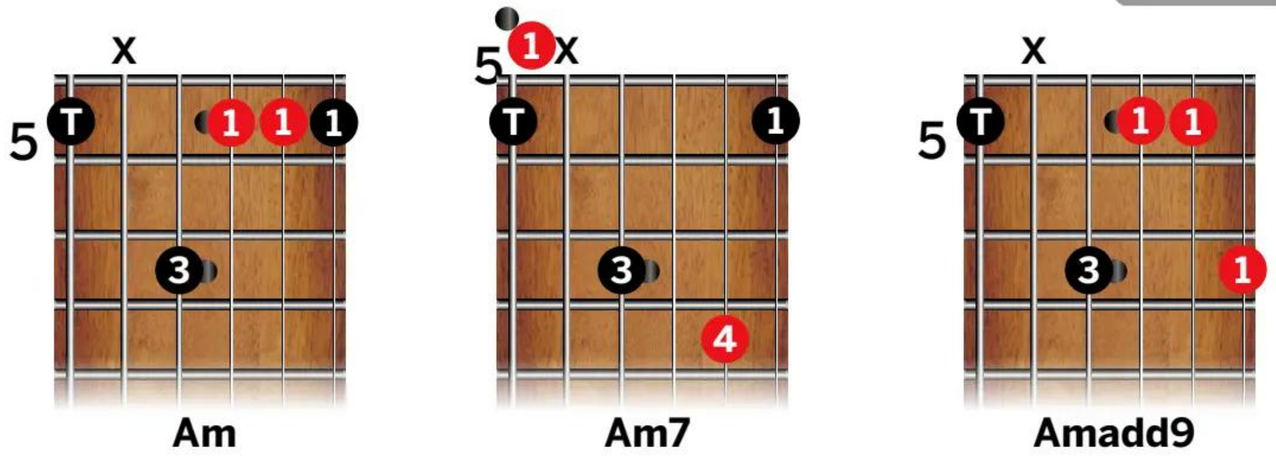


This first-finger barre across three strings is a key part of Jimi's rhythm style. You *cannot* play like Hendrix without this shape. We've only scratched the surface, but experiment with your second and fourth fingers, too. Start with the one-finger barre and hammer on to the additional notes in C/E, Am and Cadd9/G for authentic sounds in the style of *Bold As Love* and more.

MINOR CHORD SHAPES

Track 17

The 'thumb over the neck' and one-finger barre techniques also apply to minor chords. Remember, Jimi would often play only two or three notes from each shape – an idea that allows you to ditch the occasional note you can't easily reach and focus on cleanly fretting the more colourful extensions.



TRIPLET HAMMER-ON PULL-OFF TRICK

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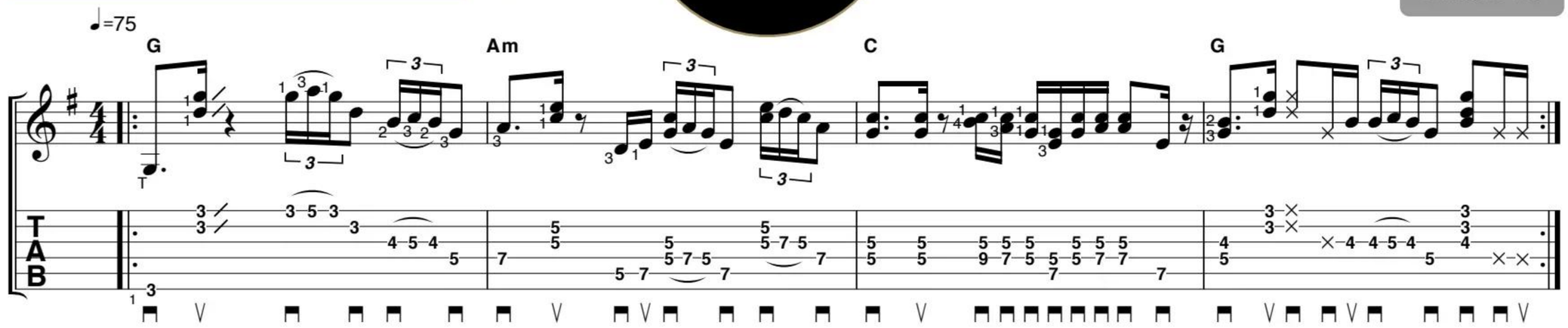
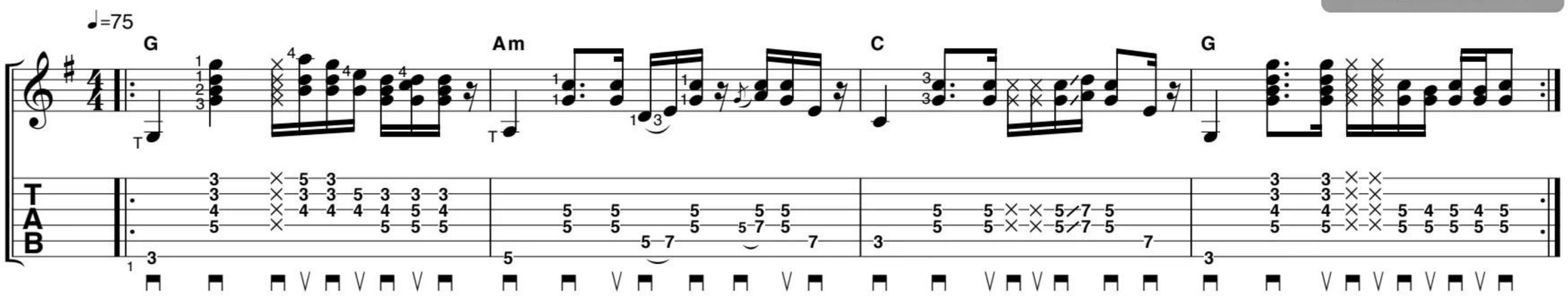
Track 18



With a selection of Jimi's favourite chord shapes under our belts, here we look at one of his signature phrasing tricks that influenced players including Pearl Jam's Mike McCready and former Red Hot Chili Peppers guitarist, John Frusciante. The idea is to play a rapid hammer-on and pull-off to an extended chord tone (sus4 or add9, for example) using a triplet rhythm. Triplets are marked in notation with a '3'.

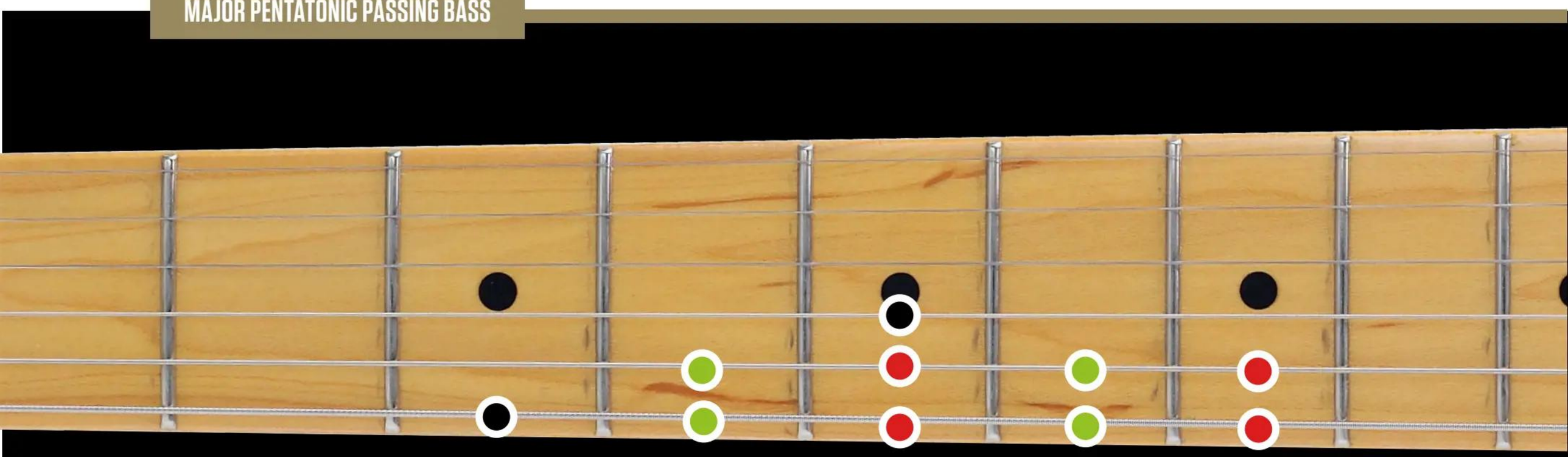
INSTANT HENDRIX CHORD PROGRESSION

Tracks 19-20



You might think there's nothing overly Hendrix-like in a G-Am-C-G sequence, but Jimi's rhythm work turns this basic progression into quite the signature line. The first two chords in our example, G (G-B-D) and Am (A-C-E), don't share any notes, but in bar 1 we've added A, E then C embellishments. It's a trick on the ear that hints at both chords – and Jimi did this all the time. In bars 2 and 3 we're implying both Am and C chords throughout – you can even play these bars in the 'wrong' order. The bass guitar pins it all down with root notes to keep you on track.

MAJOR PENTATONIC PASSING BASS



You've learnt our G-Am-C-G progression, now it's time to try another of Jimi's methods of navigating a chord sequence, this time with passing bass notes, *Hey Joe* or *Manic Depression* style. Black dots are G root notes, the red dots are from the G major pentatonic scale (G A B D E), and the green dots are 'chromatic' notes from outside the key signature. Simply strum one of the chords from the progression then experiment with the single notes to 'walk' melodically to the next chord.

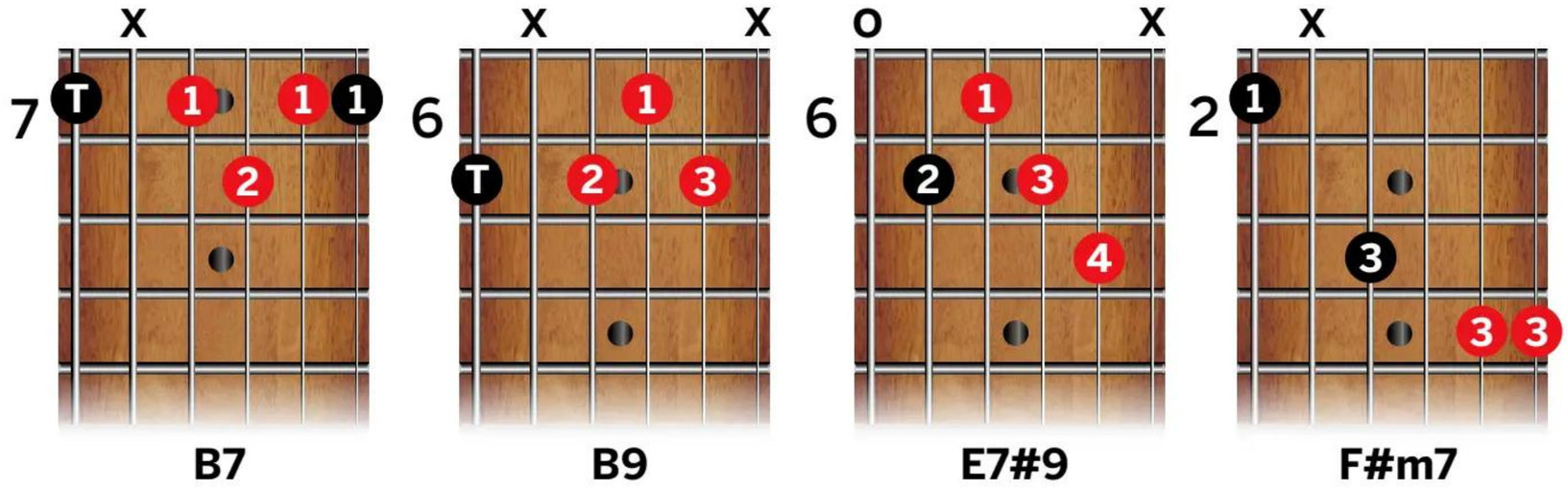
JIMI'S FUNK-ROCK

He's arguably best known for his fiery, psychedelic lead guitar style, but Jimi played with so much groove, too. Here we look at the more aggressively rhythmic side of the founding father of funk-rock

FUNK CHORDS

Track 21

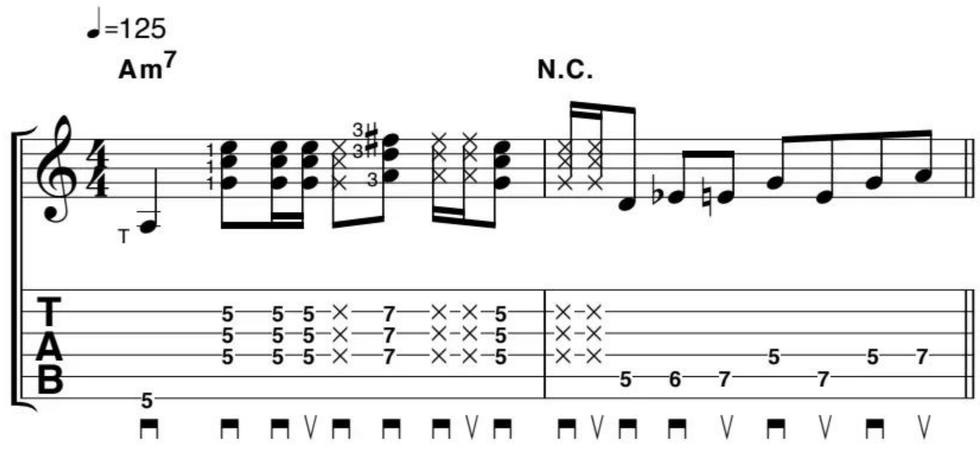
Get your fingers round these hard, edgy-sounding chords and you'll be part way to nailing Jimi's aggressive funk-rock stylings. The 7#9 is the great man's best-known signature chord and can be heard in *Purple Haze*, *Foxey Lady*, *Crosstown Traffic* and more.



"The 7#9 is the great man's best-known signature chord"

SINGLE-NOTE RIFFS

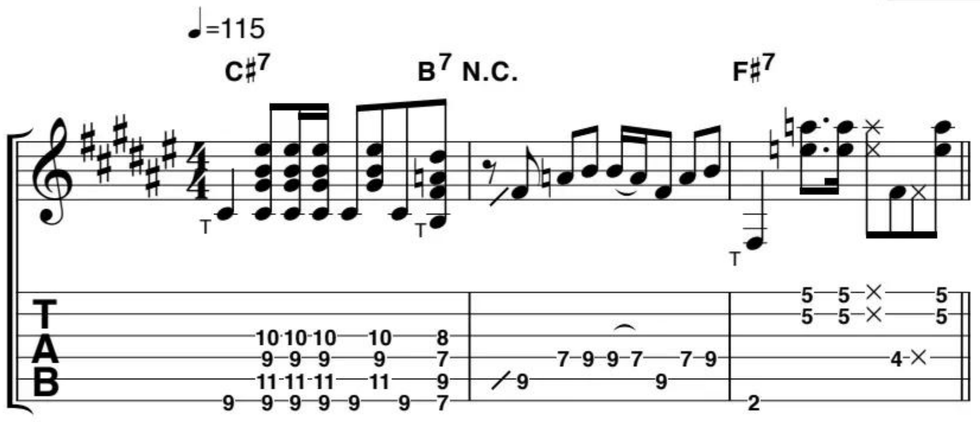
Tracks 22-23



Some of Jimi's funkiest material was played with Band Of Gypsys. With a mixture of partial chords, fret-hand mutes and single-note pentatonic lines, this tab example will help you master the vibe of tracks such as *We Gotta Live Together*.

PLAY LOOSE AND TIGHT

Tracks 24-25



Jimi could play tight or loose, and this riff is an example of both methods, mixing up a *Foxey Lady*-style groove with the more strummy chords of songs like *Can You See Me*. Maintain a steady 16th-note picking motion, relax into the C#7 barre chord and stay tighter on the F#7.

Work Experience: Jimi cut his teeth playing soul with Curtis Knight

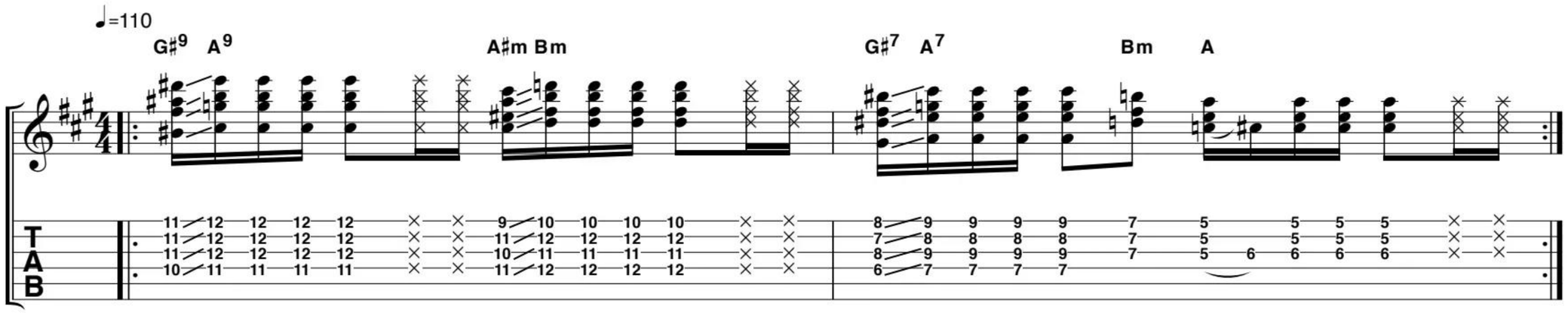
© Gilles Petard/Redferns/Getty Images

JIMI'S SOUL STYLE

Before the pyrotechnics and psychedelia of The Jimi Hendrix Experience made him a household name, Jimi played on Nashville's Chitlin' soul circuit. Learn the guitar secrets of this lesser known side of Hendrix...

ASCENDING CHORD RUNS

Tracks 26-27



Jimi's soul, R&B and funk influences can be clearly heard in songs such as *Dolly Dagger*. This vamp, although based essentially on A7 and Bm chords, shows you how Jimi used inversions and other chord embellishments for a more varied and exciting vibe while keeping a tight and tidy soul groove.

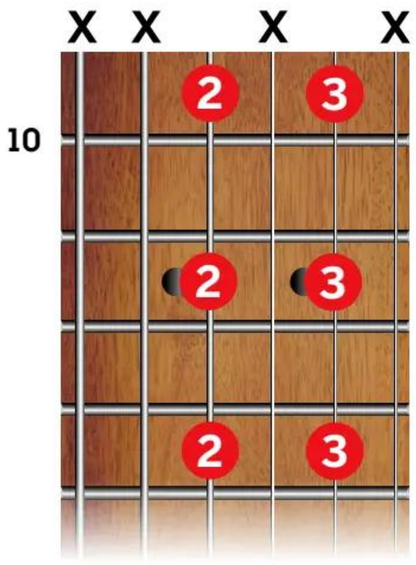
MAJOR PENTATONIC SOUL RIFFS

Tracks 28-29

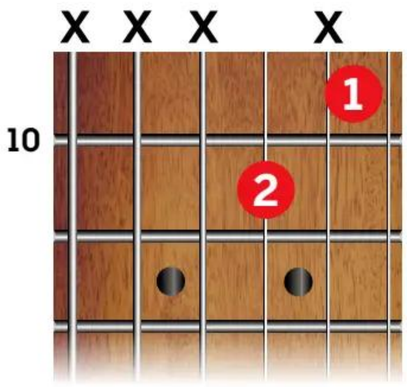
Here in this Curtis Knight-inspired example, funky rhythms and single-note lines that spell out chord progressions are the order of the day. At the heart of our riff is a B7 chord, but the fretting pattern resembles an open position G7 shape, so keep this in mind as you play through the tab.

6TH INTERVAL SHAPES

Tracks 30-31

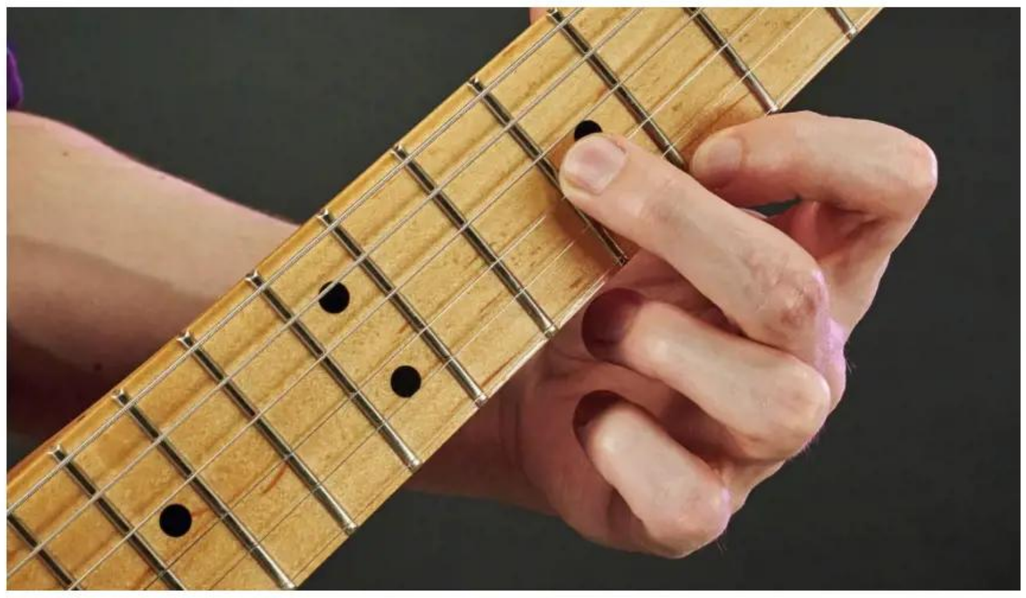


Major 6ths



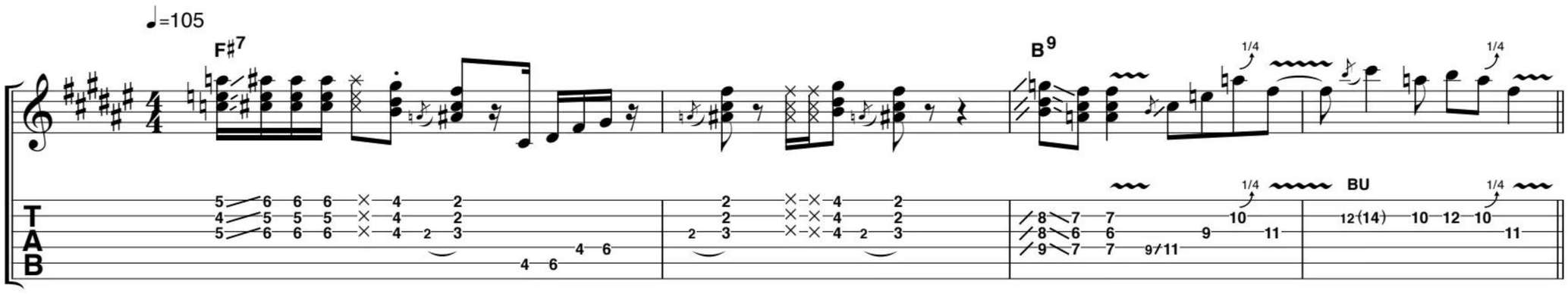
Minor 6th

These 6th interval diads are staple shapes in soul music and can be heard played by Jimi in a slightly rockier way on *Night Bird Flying*. These are two-note shapes, so make sure you're able to play them with any pair of fingers (first and second; second and third; etc). We've used all four of the diads shown here in our audio example. See if you can work out which order we played them in.



CLASSIC BLUES LEAD

Tracks 32-33



Citing influences such as Albert King, Elmore James and BB King, it's obvious that Jimi was a disciple of the blues. This example borrows from such classics as *Red House* and *Purple Haze*, and also calls up *Don't Accuse Me* from Jimi's soul period. As was typical of his earlier work, we're switching between funky chords and bluesy minor pentatonic lead. Play the quarter-tone bends (marked with an arrow and a '1/4' in the tab) gently, but quickly, so they don't ring for too long – quarter-tones can sound lame if you hold on too long.

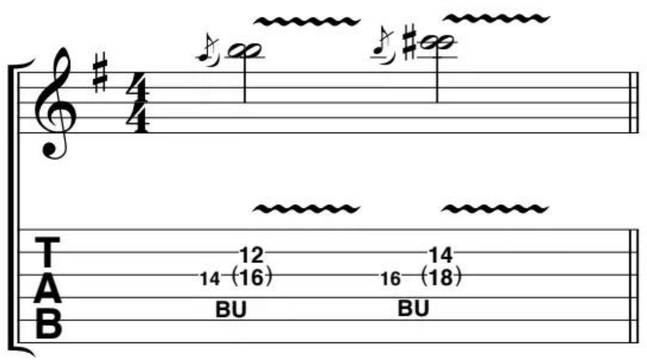
JIMI'S LEAD TECHNIQUES

Jimi's fiery lead guitar style revolutionised rock, influencing players as diverse as Stevie Ray Vaughan, Joe Satriani, Eddie Van Halen, John Frusciante, Kirk Hammett and more. We look at the techniques that broke the mould

STRING BENDS GET YOUR FINGERS ROUND THE MOST EXPRESSIVE OF LEAD TECHNIQUES

UNISON BENDS

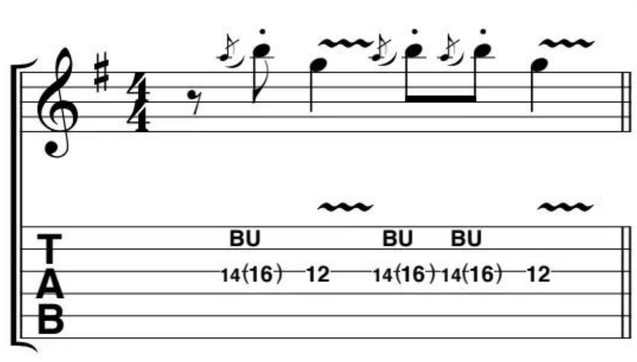
Track 34



Check out the solos in *All Along The Watchtower* and you'll hear Jimi's unison' bends (two notes of the same pitch played at the same time – one with a string bend and one with a fretted note). You can play quickly and precisely, so you don't hear much of the bend up, or you can draw out the bend creating dissonance on the way.

STACCATO BEND

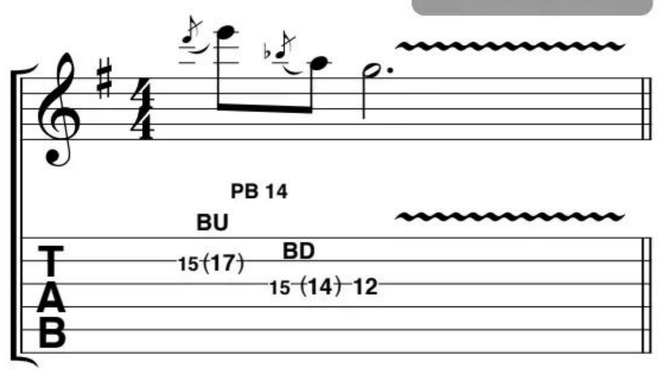
Track 35



Jimi loved this technique and used it in so many songs, perhaps most notably *Foxey Lady*. As you reach the peak of the bend, touch the string with your pick to mute the note and create the staccato effect. Follow up on the next note with rapid BB King-style vibrato, rotating your wrist, rather than moving just your fretting finger.

CATCH BEND

Track 36



This tricky technique is a Jimi trademark made up of two string bends: a standard bend followed by a pre-bend on an adjacent string, which is then released. Simply roll your second finger across from the second string to 'catch' the third. The course of the first bend should automatically push the third string into a bend.

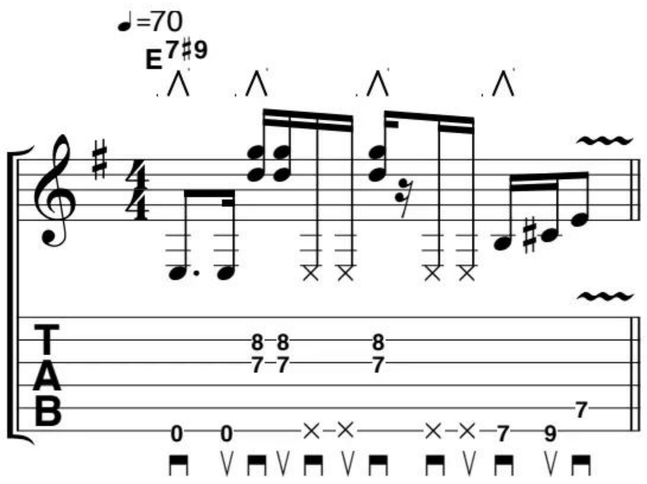
Get your various bending techniques sharpened up to capture Jimi's mojo

Hendrix's wah use was both creative and hugely expressive

WAH TECHNIQUE GET YOUR GROOVE ON WITH THIS THREE-STAGE LOOK AT JIMI'S WAH STYLE

VOODOO CHILD WAH

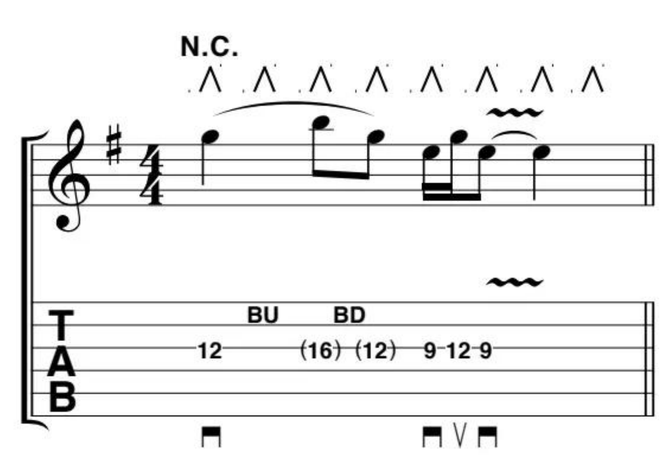
Tracks 37-38



The wah movement here keeps time on the quarter-note pulse, as if you were tapping your foot in time. The trick is to develop independence in your foot, so it doesn't follow the other rhythms you play with your hands.

CRYING BABY EFFECT

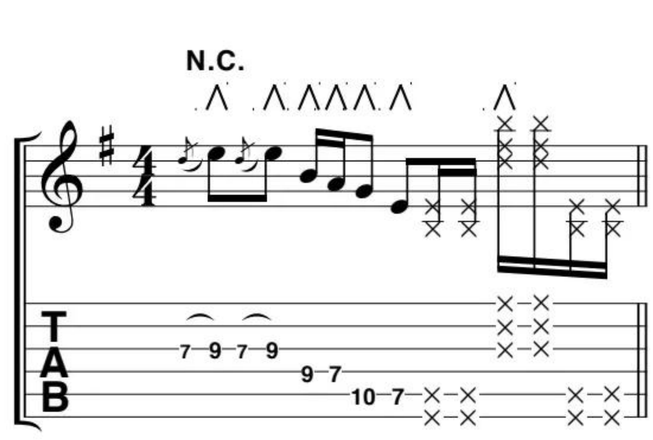
Tracks 39-40



The faster eighth-note wah rhythm can be done on anything but tends to work best on single notes. This way you'll really hear the classic 'crying baby' effect that helped so-name the original Dunlop pedal. The faster wah action makes this much easier to play when standing up.

FOLLOWING NOTES WAH

Tracks 41-42

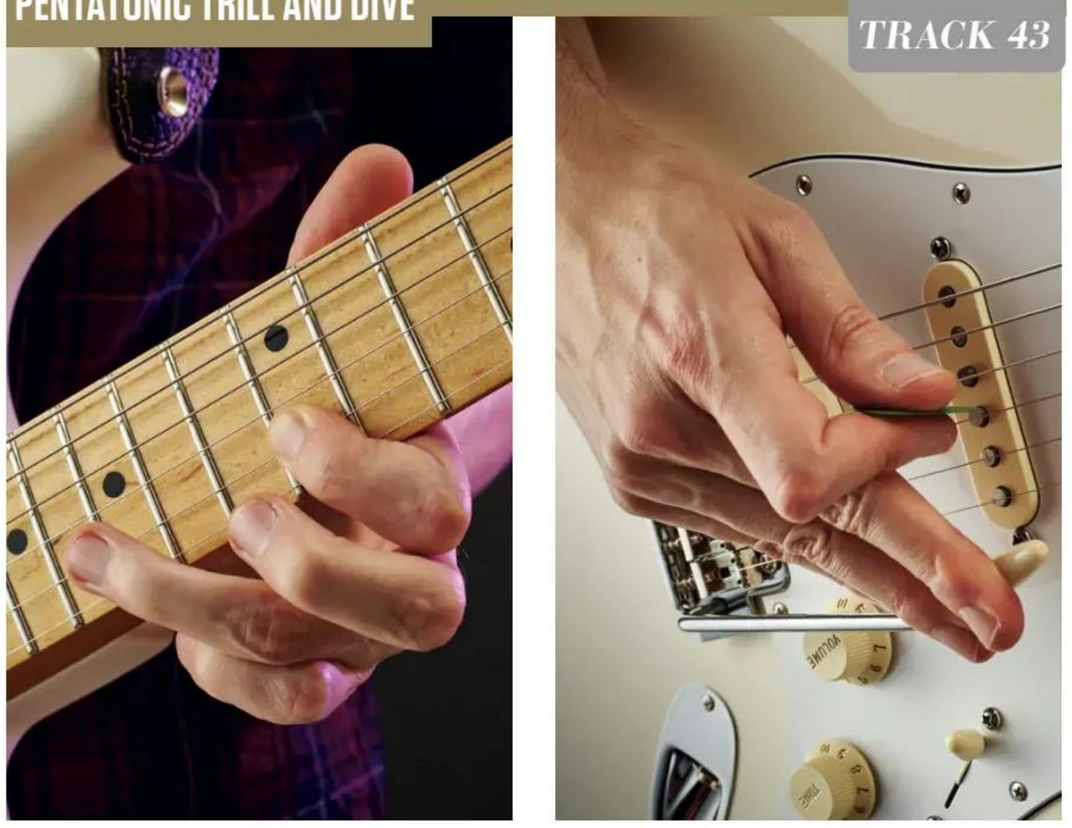


This vocal-like effect is great on cleaner sounds, where you can follow individual targeted notes, rather than just moving in a constant rhythm. This is much more difficult and harder on the foot and ankle, so you might like to try this at a slower tempo initially.

HYBRID TECHNIQUES SOME OF JIMI'S MOST EXTREME SOUNDS CAME FROM MIXING DIFFERENT TECHNIQUES TOGETHER

PENTATONIC TRILL AND DIVE

TRACK 43

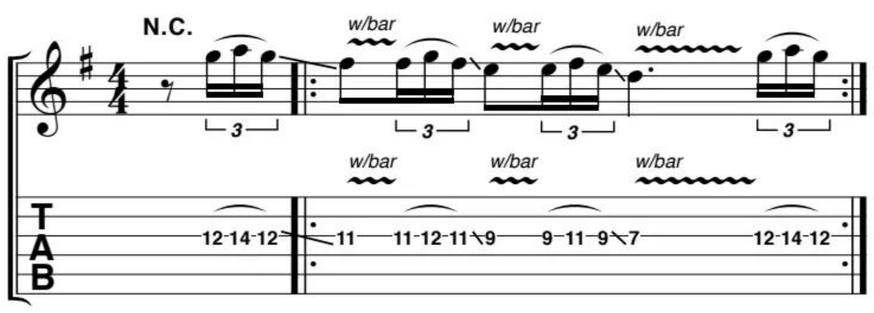


Simply depress your whammy bar while performing a trill with hammer-ons and pull-offs at the 12th and 15th frets on the second string to achieve this interesting ambulance-siren-style doppler effect. For more extreme sounds, try it on the third string, which has lower tension.

"Jimi was so ahead of the times with his legato technique. His style spawned the fluid technique of many players"

LEGATO AND SLIDES

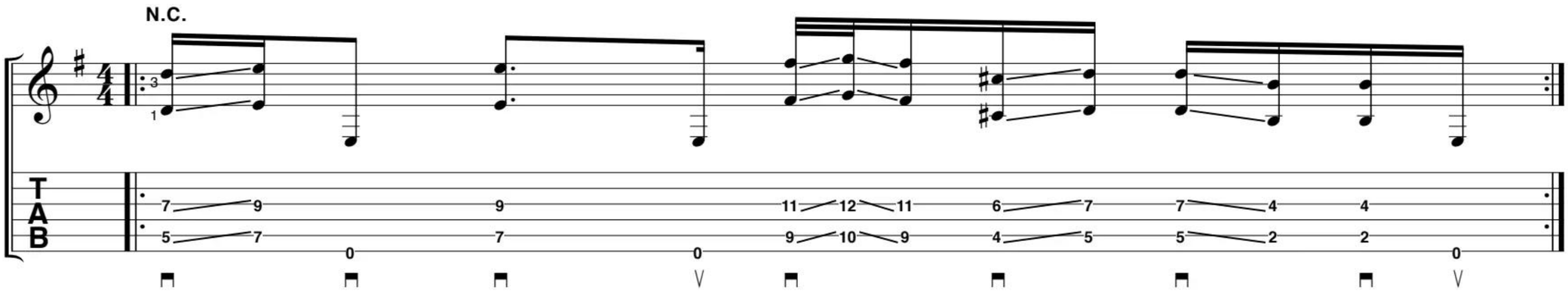
Track 44



Jimi was so ahead of the times with his legato technique. His style spawned the fluid technique of many players including Richie Blackmore and Joe Satriani (and many modern shredders, too) with this very idea. It allows for fast movement and coverage of the neck.

SLIDES AND DRONE

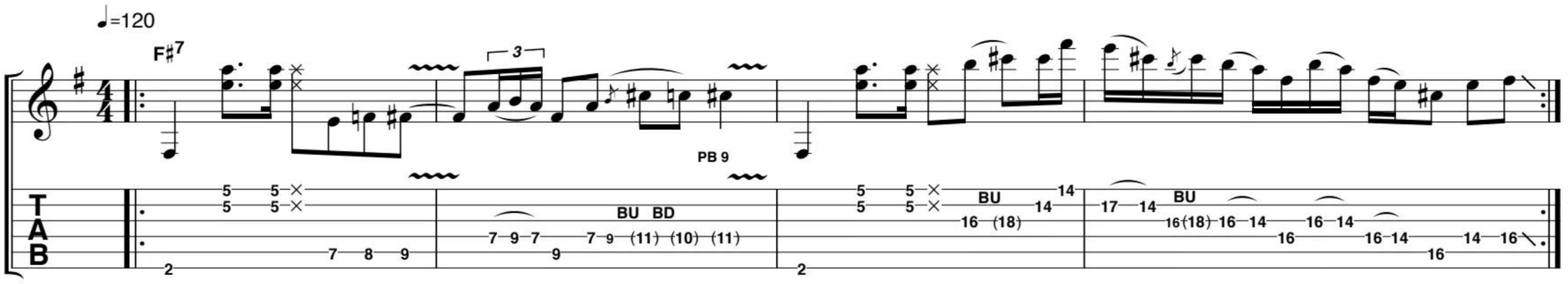
Track 45



Jimi's psychedelic and Indian influences can be heard in ideas such as this. The low E is used as a constant drone in the background while the octaves spell out notes from the E Dorian scale (E F# G A B C# D).

RHYTHM/LEAD CROSSOVER

Tracks 46-47



This example combines *Foxey Lady*-style chord playing with more technical fast pentatonic ideas in 14th position. Use all the available pull-offs to aid the speed of the final lick. You may wish to bend up and down in one motion in the final bar.

WHAMMY BAR TECHNIQUES JIMI PIONEERED THE AGGRESSIVE USE OF THE WHAMMY BAR AND INFLUENCED GENERATIONS OF SHREDDERS

DIVEBOMB TRILL

Track 48

This is one of Jimi's more extreme techniques and follows on from the pentatonic trill idea. It works particularly well on the fourth and third strings, but you should experiment all over the fretboard. Simply trill with hammer-ons and pull-offs between the 12th fret and the open note on your chosen string as you dip the whammy bar.

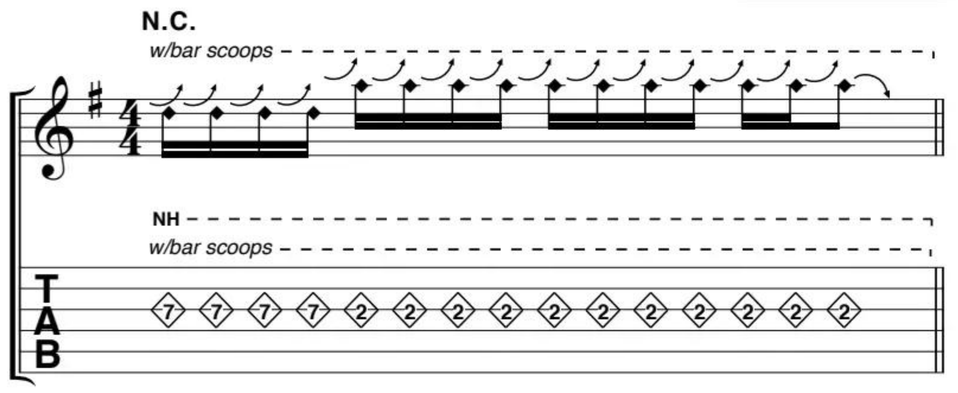
CLASSIC JIMI DIVE

Track 49

Unlike EVH's single-note divebombs with Van Halen, Jimi tended to favour using several strings for a more wild and out-of-tune sound that's not far off a demented car engine. Slide your hand up the fretboard then apply a divebomb in one continuous, fluid motion.

HARMONIC SCOOPS

Track 50

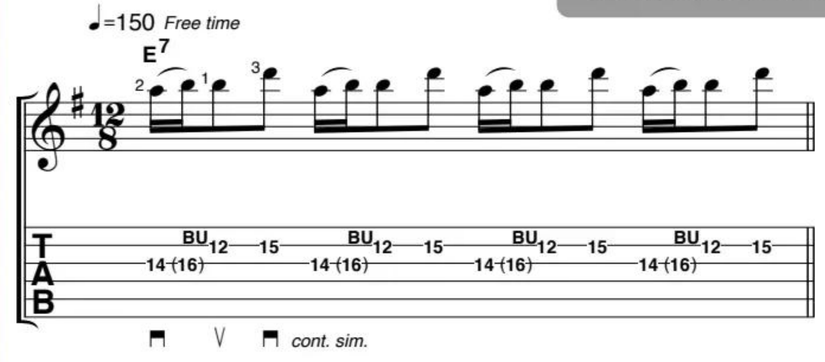


Jimi often used harmonics to coax feedback from his amp. If you're not playing at Jimi's ear-splitting levels, use the higher harmonics at the 2nd fret to achieve a more biting effect. You can almost hear the influence on Dimebag Darrell's playing style. Make sure to dial in plenty of gain.

PLAYING BY FEEL SPEED UP OR SLOW DOWN – IT'S UP TO YOU AS YOU PLAY THIS FREE TIME LICK BY FEEL

Playing in and out of time

Tracks 51-52



There's no real rule here – it's all about the 'feel'. Simply speed up and slow down this repeating phrase as you see fit. Eventually, you'll hit some rhythms that align with the rhythm of the backing music. It's a trick Jimi would often use in his improvised solos.

VIDEO RIFF LESSONS

Learn three classic Hendrix guitar riffs with our free video lessons on FileSilo

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FOXEY LADY

TOP TIP
If you find thumb fretting uncomfortable, you can fret the sixth string with your first finger

Foxey Lady begins with a long, sustained F# note played at the 11th fret on the third string. Fret the note with your second finger, bunch your first finger up next to it to add support then increase your grip on the string. Add a wide vibrato, keeping your fingers locked in position and repeatedly turning your wrist back and forth, pulling the string in the direction of the floor. Try to generate a little feedback as your vibrato gets more intense.

After sliding down the neck, form an unorthodox Fm7 chord shape with your thumb over the top of the neck, your third finger on the fourth string and your fourth finger barring the top two strings. The next chord is a B major, which lends the riff an F# Dorian flavour (F# G# A B C# D# E).

Cheat sheet

Appears at: 0:00-0:20
Tempo: 90bpm
Key/scale: F# Dorian
Main techniques: Wide vibrato and thumb fretting

VOODOO CHILD (SLIGHT RETURN)

TOP TIP
Find the sweet spot of your wah and use a smaller rocking motion, rather than the entire range of the pedal

There are two key playing elements to this classic guitar riff from 1968's *Electric Ladyland*. First up is the light shuffle groove, which you may not immediately pick up on because the swinging feel affects the 16th notes, rather than the more usual eighth notes in a shuffle rhythm. And, although you don't pick every note, you can match the shuffle groove to your downstrokes and upstrokes to keep your pick hand locked in time.

The second vital part to master is Jimi's rhythmic wah phrases. Play a constant quarter-note pulse on your wah's treadle – that means you press your toes down in time with the 85bpm tempo. The guitar on the recording is tuned down to E♭, but we've recorded our video in E standard so you can play along without retuning.

Cheat sheet

Appears at: 0:10-0:32
Tempo: 85bpm
Key/scale: E minor pentatonic
Main techniques: Wah-wah / 16th note shuffle groove / string bends

THE WIND CRIES MARY

TOP TIP
Select the neck pickup and roll off the volume and tone controls slightly to keep the tone mellow

This riff is based on three chords, E♭, E and F, and these ascend the fretboard one fret at a time. Jimi plays the chords as 'inversions', which simply means the lowest note in the shape isn't the root – it's one of the other notes instead. This method can make even the simplest chord sequence sound less predictable as the ear struggles to pick up on the root. On the first pass Jimi places the 5th intervals in the bass to give the chords a solid, fat sound. On the second time the chords are played with the major 3rds as the lowest notes and Jimi adds a hammer-on to each shape – a trademark of his rhythm style. Start by learning the chord shapes and making sure you can move cleanly from fret to fret. When you have the basics down you can try Jimi's hammer-on phrase. Watch the video for all the details.

Cheat sheet

Appears at: 0:00 -0:14
Tempo: 70bpm
Key/scale: Chromatic / E major
Main techniques: Chromatic chord movement and chord hammer-ons

Guitarist PRESENTS

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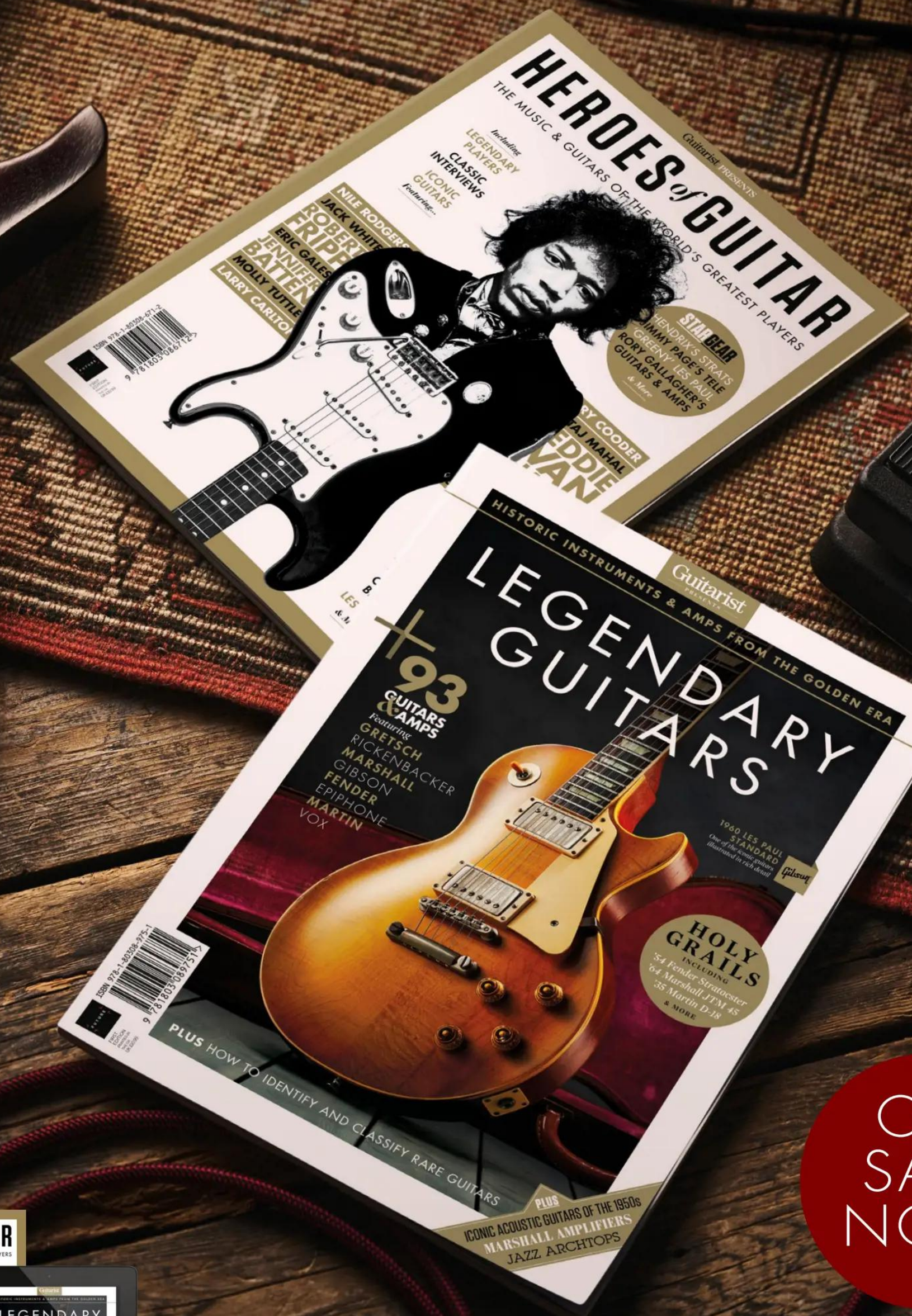

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ERIC CLAPTON

From 1966 to 1976, Eric Clapton redefined the sound of rock guitar. Join us as we discover how this monumental decade changed the face of guitar playing forever…

The year was 1966. The year that saw Bob Dylan hold fast to his electric guitar with *Blonde On Blonde*; the year that saw FIFA World Cup madness drench England, and the year that celebrated the conviction of Moors Murderers Myra Hyndley and Ian Brady. London was well and truly swinging, with mini skirts, Mary Quant and Manfred Mann high on everyone's agendas. But from within the haze and smog of the big city grew an army of six-string fanatics, each preaching the word of 'god' and defacing public property with a single, immortal line: 'Clapton is God.' No exclamation marks were needed to punctuate the fervour of this statement. Nothing else needed to be said. Eric Clapton – barely entered into adulthood at 21 – had achieved deity status in the guitar world.

In a filthy underground station in Islington, London, the first proclamation of Clapton's genius was sprayed-painted onto a wall. Scores more would soon follow elsewhere, and the phrase 'Clapton is God' became the new mantra for London's guitar-loving faithful.

After earning the nickname 'Slowhand' in The Yardbirds, Eric Clapton's guitar playing was legend by '66. Jimmy Page, peer, Led Zeppelin superstar and longtime friend of Clapton knew that whatever Clapton had, it was otherworldly. "When Eric was with The Bluesbreakers, it was a magical combination," he recalled. "He played brilliantly then, really brilliantly." Clapton's Yardbirds successor, Jeff Beck, admitted those were big shoes he had to fill: "Back then we were both blues, and he was better."

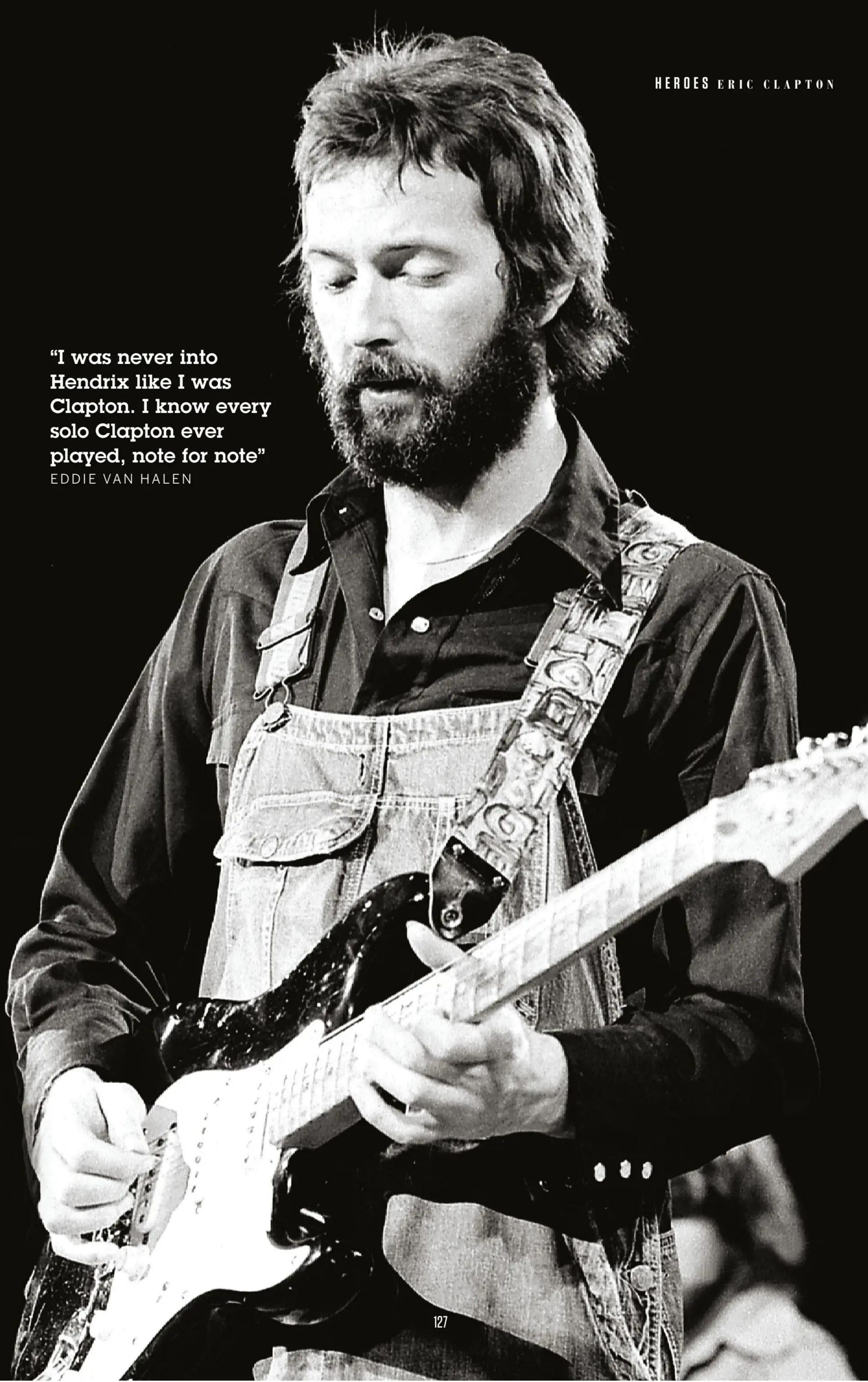
Clapton's influence on rock guitar during his glory years was gargantuan. He played second fiddle to no-one, not even Hendrix. Think anything to the contrary? Let us set the record straight...

The well-worn story is that Jimi Hendrix led the 60s guitar pack. History hands him almost sole credit for making the electric six-string the most expressive musical instrument of our time. While we would never deny Hendrix of his rightful place as one of the most gifted players in the history of guitar, the late 60s were not just his possession. Not even close.

Much like Hendrix, Clapton grew up listening to rock 'n' roll and blues, reinventing the playing styles that came before him. Forget his later years, pock-marked by chart-humping tracks like *Wonderful Tonight* or the mournful *Tears In Heaven*: Clapton was, and will always be, a master of blues-rock guitar. In John Mayall's Bluesbreakers, he honed his blues chops to enviable heights; with Cream, he carved out a thick slab of heavy rock that's emulated to this day by millions of guitarists around the globe. From 1970 until the late 90s and beyond he poured out platinum release after platinum release, even revisiting some of his greatest tracks on the multi-Grammy-winning *Unplugged* because they were that good.

But it was from '66 to '76 that Clapton's star shone brighter than anyone else's. He embodied the vision of the ultimate guitar god, basking in the glory of his playing prowess and earning the respect and admiration of countless talented peers

"I was never into Hendrix like I was Clapton. I know every solo Clapton ever played, note for note"
EDDIE VAN HALEN



Robert Knight Archive/Redferns/Getty Images

and future guitar stars. Ask Eddie Van Halen what turned him onto the guitar and he'll tell you straight: "It was the Bluesbreakers album with Eric Clapton on the front reading *The Beano* [John Mayall's Bluesbreakers With Eric Clapton]. I like Hendrix," says Eddie, "but I was never into him like I was Clapton. I know every solo Clapton ever played, note for note."

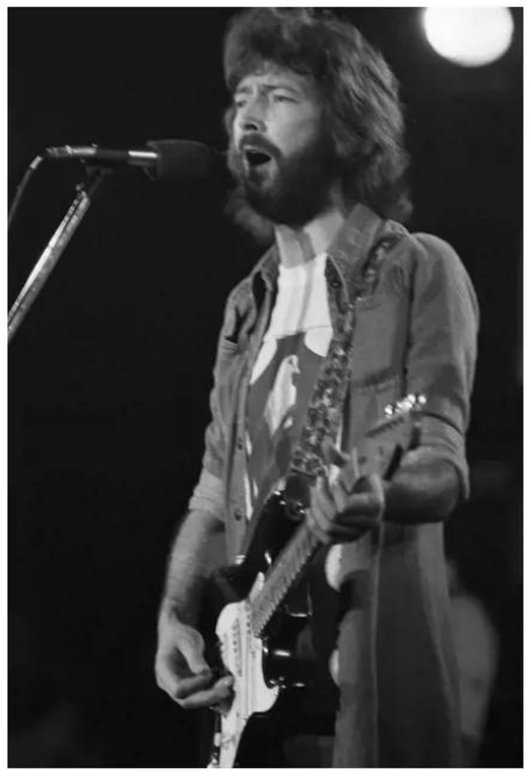
Much like EVH, Gary Moore cites the 'Beano' album as a major turning point in music: "It blew me away. I borrowed my friend's copy because I couldn't afford to buy it. I wore that out and scratched the shit out of it just learning the solos."

The 'Beano album' became a milestone in music. Having lodged with bluesman John Mayall, the 21-year-old Clapton immersed himself in Mayall's massive blues record collection and absorbed everything. As Clapton's soloing vocabulary shot light years ahead of his contemporaries', he also showed that white British musicians understood black American blues. The influences of his fast and fluent playing were clearly defined – BB, Freddie and Albert King, Buddy Guy and Otis Rush – but it was his fire, grit and passion that awoke a generation to a dangerous and exciting form of music that would remind them of the original blues artists that the world had all but forgotten.

By the time Hendrix arrived in Britain in September 1966, Clapton had already recorded 'Beano', quit Mayall and formed Cream with the nation's finest bassist and drummer, Jack Bruce and Ginger Baker. Their desire to play with Clapton was so strong that the famously feuding duo put their differences aside. While Clapton's Bluesbreakers playing was full of angst-ridden fury, in Cream it found maturity. The trio's almost instant success demanded a gruelling live schedule, which led to the band transforming their meagre repertoire into lengthy jams to fill time. This honed Clapton's skills to perfection: his solos became flowing and sophisticated, perfectly timed and building to frantic crescendos using a fat, crushing sound.

Clapton's Cream playing style has even made it into other guitarists' signature sounds, Texas-born rock virtuoso Eric Johnson's tone being a great demonstration: "I used to just sit and listen to the records and really study the way Clapton played, trying to get every inflection," Johnson remembers. "I was like an Eric Clapton jukebox for a couple of years."

In 1968, Beatles guitarist George Harrison persuaded Clapton to contribute a solo to a new Fab Four track: "[Clapton] said, 'Nobody plays on Beatles records,'" Harrison recalled. "I said, 'It's my song and I want you to play on it.' Anyway, Eric came in and played and it was really good." Many consider *While My Guitar Gently Weeps* from The Beatles' 'White' album to be one of Clapton's finest moments. In a single take,



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FROM FINGERSTYLE TO SLIDE, ERIC CLAPTON NAILS IT...

Many people think Clapton is a simple plectrum player or 'flat-picker'. But Eric's always used hybrid picking (pick and fingers) when he needs to and you can hear this on *Crossroads* from 1968's *Wheels Of Fire*.

As a slide player Clapton fused elements of George Harrison and Duane Allman. Listen to Give Me Strength from 1974's *461 Ocean Boulevard* for some cool slide guitar moments.

Acoustic-wise, Clapton's fingerstyle playing came to the fore on 1992's *Unplugged* album, and *Before You Accuse Me* is a great example of this.

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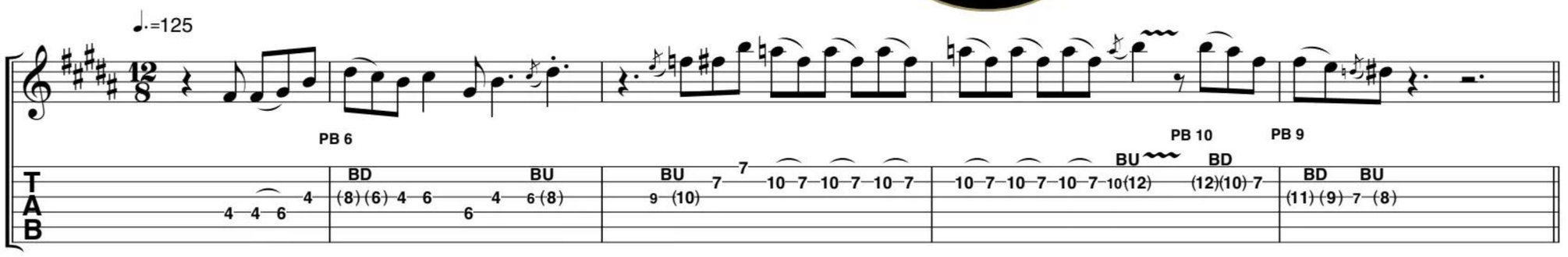
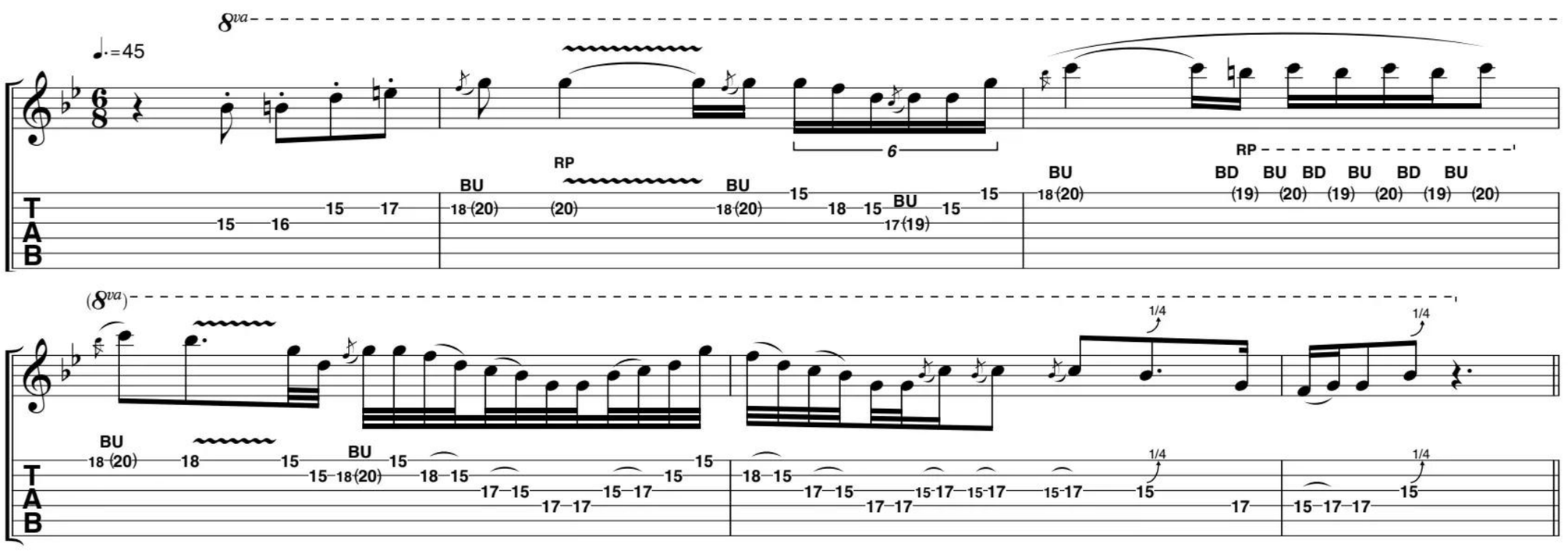
CLAPTON-STYLE LICK 1: Bluesbreakers-style shuffle



The melodic grouping of two notes against the rhythmic grouping of three eighth notes during the pull-offs may throw you. Practise slowly, counting the beats.

CLAPTON-STYLE LICK 2: slow 60s blues



Fret the tone string bend in bar 3 at the 18th fret. Release the bend a little so that the pitch lowers by a semitone. These pitches are notated as (19) and (20).

CLAPTON-STYLE LICK 3: Strat blues

This is typical Clapton with phrases that dance around the beat. Try experimenting with the shorter phrases and make up your own.

"When Eric was with The Bluesbreakers it was a magical combination"
JIMMY PAGE

Clapton showed how dynamics and real bluesiness could fit into a pop classic.

That year Cream's differences tore the band apart, and in 1969 Eric put the short-lived Blind Faith together. The supergroup – made up of Traffic's Steve Winwood, Ric Grech of Family and Cream's own Ginger Baker – released just one album, and after one short tour they just fell apart.

Fed up with the limelight, Clapton hooked up with US husband-and-wife outfit Delaney and Bonnie Bramlett. It was here that Clapton took a much-needed back seat. His playing was changing. His cleaner-toned Stratocaster demanded a more laid-back approach with fewer notes and much less distortion, but his sophisticated touch remained, and it suited the country-flavoured music he was starting to enjoy.

When Clapton came to record his self-titled first solo album in 1970, he used the Bramletts' rhythm section, with Delaney producing. "Delaney brought something out of me that I didn't know I had," said Eric. Delaney and Bonnie's musicians – Bobby Whitlock on keys, drummer Jim Gordon and bassist Carl Radle – became the basis of Clapton's alter-ego band, Derek And The Dominos, who recorded their sole studio album, *Layla And Other Assorted Love Songs*, in a haze of mind-bending drugs, with Duane Allman on slide guitar. "He was like the musical brother I never had," confides Clapton. Allman repaid the compliment: "I was glad to have the opportunity to work with people of that magnitude, with that much brilliance and talent."

Although critically ignored, the album has since become a classic, and the title track – a cry of love to George Harrison's wife Pattie, who Clapton eventually married – contains one of the greatest rock riffs of all time. *Layla And Other Assorted Love Songs*

CLAPTON'S TOP 5 TRACKS

Our pick of Clapton's finest guitar moments

HIDEAWAY (BLUESBREAKERS WITH CLAPTON)

Clapton set a Bluesbreakers precedent by recording this Freddie King instrumental that successors Peter Green and Mick Taylor would both follow. Eric rocks up this finger-twister with some fat Les Paul tone and blistering lead solos. In 1966 this was guitar technique on the edge.

HAVE YOU HEARD (BLUESBREAKERS WITH CLAPTON)

Clapton's greatest moment on the 'Beano' album sees the guitarist trading licks with tenor saxophonist Dick Heckstall-Smith. Eric builds up to his solo with tasty fills between the vocals before launching into one of the most kick-ass blues breaks that's ever been recorded.

I FEEL FREE (FRESH CREAM)

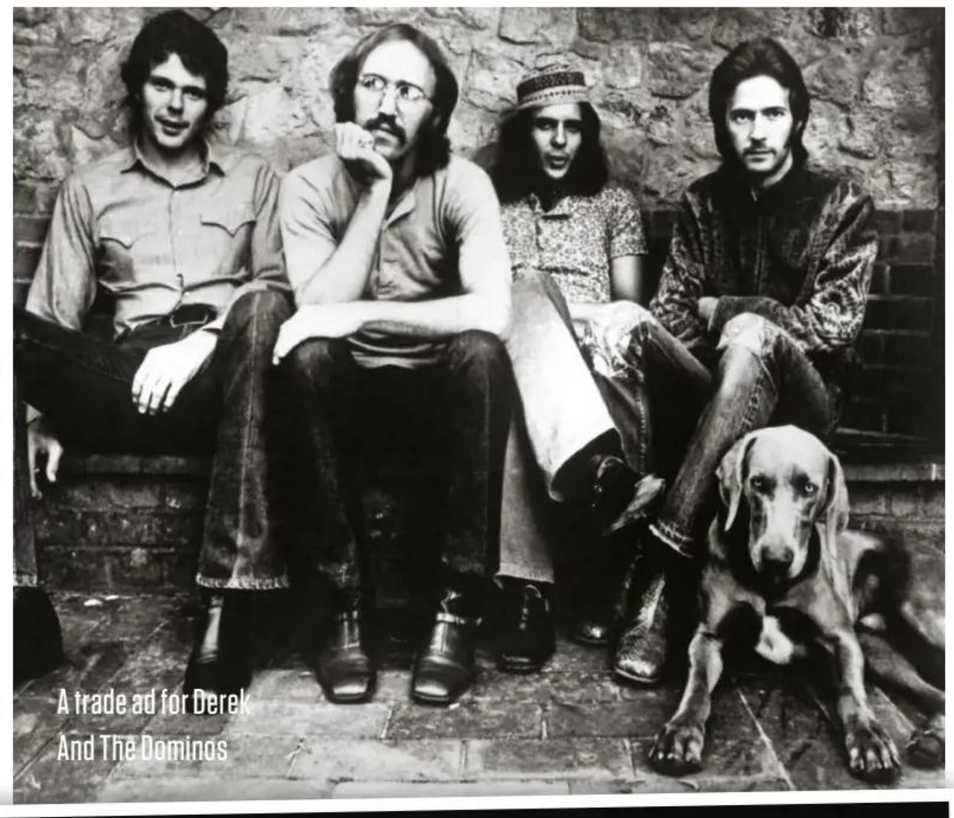
Packed full of riffs, rock track *I Feel Free* provides Clapton with the opportunity for a 'composed', un-bluesy solo. He begins on 'woman' tone (neck pickup on full, tone backed off) before switching to the bridge pickup for the solo's final lick.

CROSSROADS (WHEELS OF FIRE)

Arguably Clapton's finest track, this re-make of Robert Johnson's classic shows how Eric built the intensity of his live solos. There are two 24-bar breaks: the first is restrained and tasteful; the second takes off like a rocket, Eric throwing in everything he's got. Awesome!

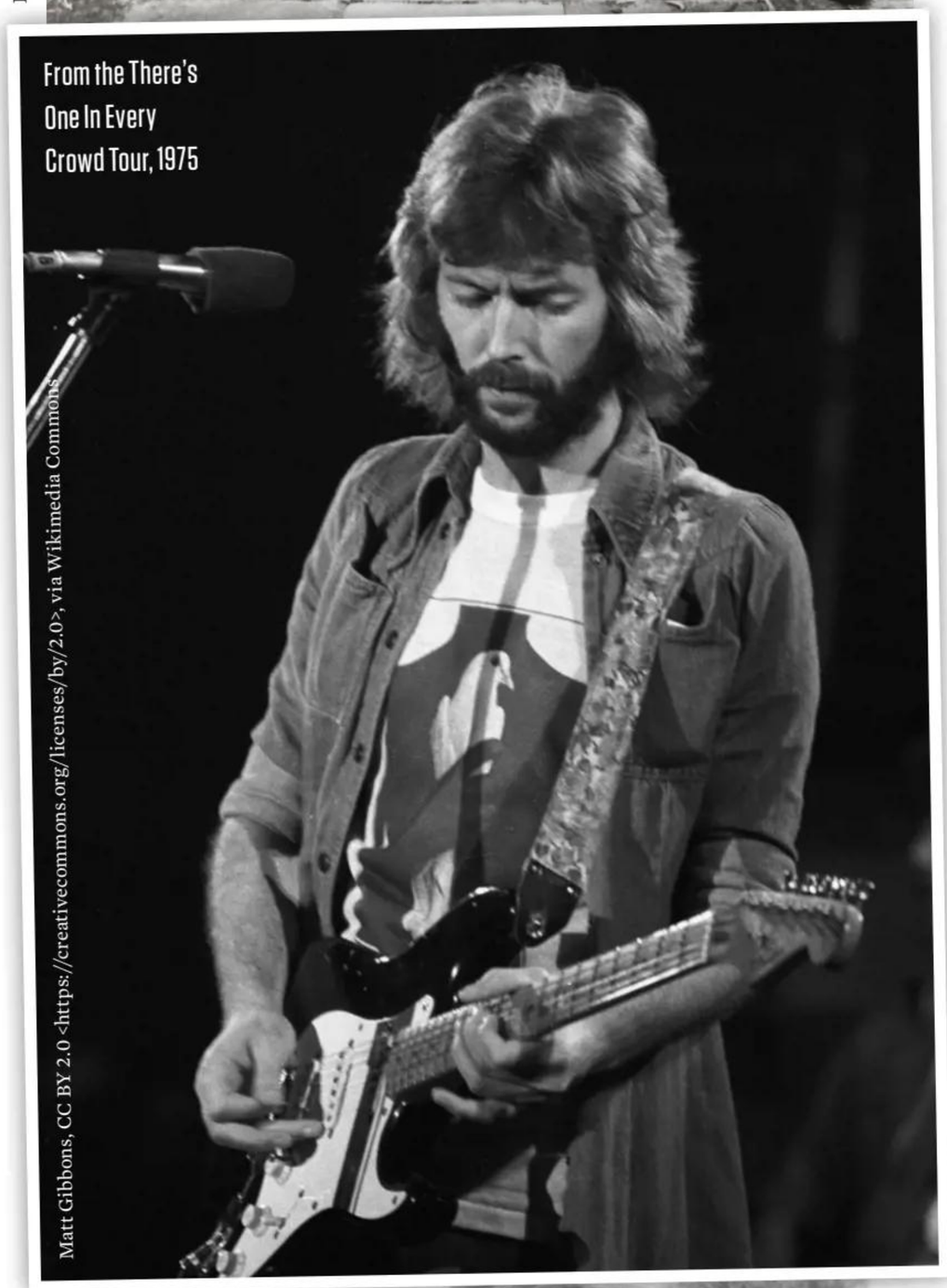
LAYLA (LAYLA AND OTHER ASSORTED LOVE SONGS)

Written as a cry of love to Pattie Harrison, *Layla* launches into a multi-tracked riff in three octaves. Eric's sunburst Strat 'Brownie' screams out the tune, while guest Duane Allman's slide takes the song into the stratosphere. It's one of the greatest riffs of all time, no question.



A trade ad for Derek And The Dominos

Photo by Michael Ochs Archives/Getty Images



From the There's One In Every Crowd Tour, 1975

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Ginger Baker, Jack Bruce and Eric Clapton as Cream

General Artists Corporation/Atco Records, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

In 2006 the Fender Custom Shop recreated Blackie with painstaking accuracy (pictured left)

Cream was the first rock supergroup

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GOD'S GEAR
THE SETUP THAT GAVE ERIC HIS LEGENDARY SOUND...

Clapton's Bluesbreakers setup was a Marshall 50-watt combo and '60 Gibson Les Paul. In Cream he used a JTM45 100-watt half-stack in the studio and stacked two amps on four 4x12 cabinets onstage. When his Les Paul was stolen, Clapton switched to a '64 ES-335 and an early 60s SG. During his solo career Fender Strats (vintage or Custom Shop 'signatures') have been favourite, with Soldano, Cornell and vintage tweed Fender Twin amplifiers.

"I scratched the shit out Mayall's 'Beano' album learning to play the solos"
GARY MOORE

showed the world a sharper-toned, more pop-oriented Clapton, his Strat maintaining that lighter edge. That same year, Hendrix died, never knowing The Dominos had covered of one of his greatest songs, *Little Wing*.

Hendrix's unexpected death fuelled Clapton's mounting depression and increasing reliance on drugs. After several years in a heroin-induced recluse, Clapton emerged clean in 1974. His first album after recovery, *461 Ocean Boulevard*, breathed an understated class with songs like *Let It Grow* and *Give Me Strength*, featuring Harrison/Allman-influenced slide guitar.

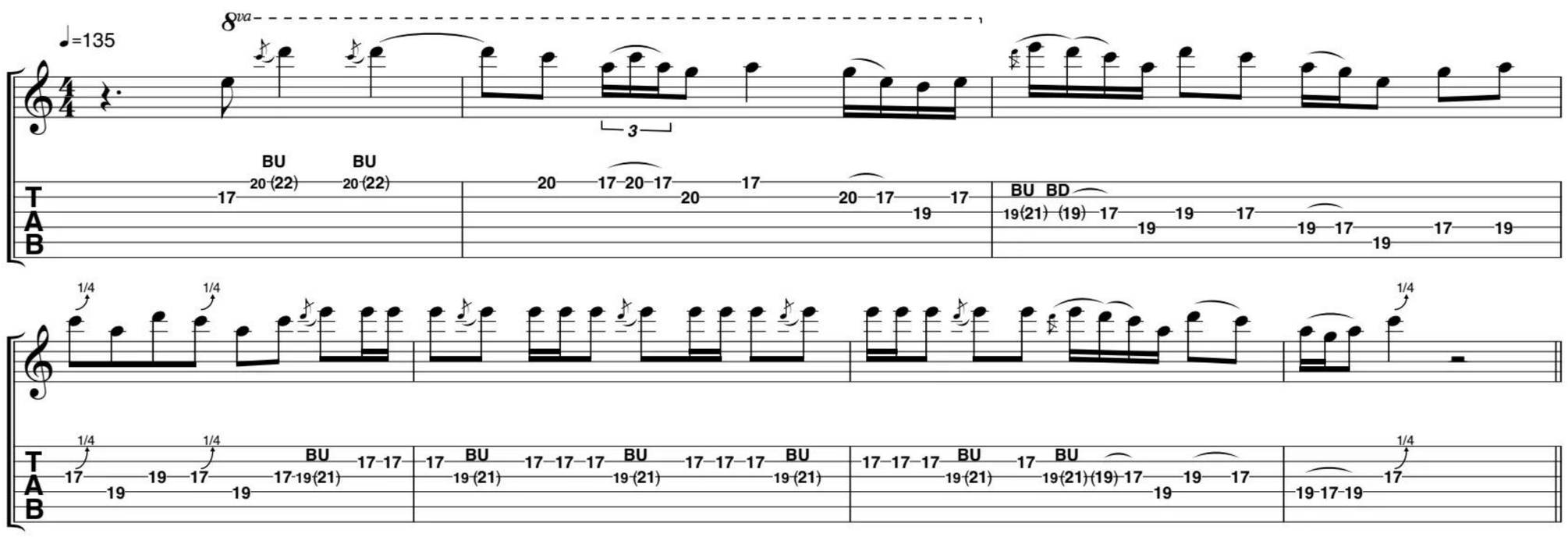
The album's surprise hit, though, was a cover of Bob Marley's *I Shot The Sheriff*. As a result of Clapton's patronage, Marley's career received a huge boost. "To my utter astonishment it went straight to No 1," declared Clapton. "I didn't meet Bob Marley until much later, but he did call me up when the single came out and seemed pretty happy."

Many Cream-era Clapton followers hated the new laid-back Eric. But despite the hecklers, this easy style was garnering new fans and when Slowhand covered JJ Cale's *Cocaine*, it struck a chord in both camps. *Cocaine*'s insistent riff propelled the track along and Clapton's glossy, Stratocaster-toned playing showed confidence and maturity, eschewing the need for flashy speed.

Eric Clapton's career has lasted over 50 years beyond Cream. It's one of the greatest in all of rock, and the fact that it was founded on playing blues guitar is a testament to Clapton's dedication to his music and influences. His playing continues to evolve, and today's Clapton is an accomplished acoustic fingerstylist, a fine slide player, and his blues lead lines remain recognisable from one single phrase.

As BB King puts it: "I've been around the world and met kings and queens, but I've never met a more gracious man than Eric Clapton. In my opinion, Clapton's No 1." Clapton is God.

CLAPTON-STYLE LICK 4: Cream-style stomp



There's bags of energy in this uptempo lick. Use the A minor pentatonic scale throughout and, again, use this lick as inspiration for your own ideas.

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THE RED STRATOCASTER

For thousands of guitarists in the early 60s, a Fiesta Red Fender Stratocaster symbolised a thrilling new era of music. Hank Marvin was the first iconic exponent of the red Strat, coaxing clean tones as lush as a manicured lawn from his famous Fender, but a hard-charging generation of players that followed found the Strat could scream as well as sigh – and the late, great Gary Moore was one of the finest among them. His '61 Fiesta Red Strat is synonymous with his blistering blues-rock style – while the origin of its distinctive milky-red finish, which is not a factory Fiesta Red, still holds mysteries. When Fender released an exacting Custom Shop replica of Gary's famous guitar in 2016, to mark the fifth anniversary of his death, we joined his tech, Graham Lilley, to hear tales of Moore's favourite solidbody. Here is the resulting story, first published when the replica was launched...

When *Guitarist* reported on the auction of the late, great Gary Moore's guitar collection, one comment that came back from readers was: 'Nice, but where's the Red Strat?' Like Clapton's lost 'Beano' 'Burst or Larry Carlton's '68 ES-335, some instruments are indelibly associated with a player. Even though Gary Moore used a very wide variety of guitars during the fiery course of his career, it is to the Fiesta Red '61 Stratocaster that many of his fans return, again and again, as an icon of his artistry. So when we learned that Fender Custom Shop Master Builder John Cruz [who has since left Fender] had been given the green light to build an exacting replica of Gary's Red Strat – also known as the Pink Strat, for reasons that shall become clear – we couldn't turn down the opportunity to investigate further. At the event (made possible thanks to the help of Gary's former tech Graham Lilley, who is now custodian of Moore's extensive collection of gear), we were privileged to be able to examine the well-worn original and place it side by side with John Cruz's lovingly crafted replica for close comparison. Plug it in and crank up the volume? No problem, says Graham. If there was ever a feature likely to keep us staying happily in the office *After Hours*, this is it...

But before we arrived at that bit, we sat down with Graham to hear the story of how Gary came to own the iconic guitar in the first place, and what role it eventually played in his sonic arsenal. Graham begins by explaining that it very nearly didn't reach Gary's hands at all, as it was reportedly earmarked for sale to prog legend Greg Lake of Emerson, Lake & Palmer. "I wasn't there myself, but it was during the recording of the *Greg Lake* album in '81," Graham explains. "As usual with these things, there are variations on the story. I always understood that a chap turned up at the rehearsals, or

"Greg Lake turns up, has a look at it, and Gary said he had his fingers crossed thinking, 'Please don't buy it. Please don't buy it.' After a bit of deliberation Greg passed on it, because it was maybe just a little bit too beaten up for his tastes..." GRAHAM LILLEY

to the studio, with a couple of guitars. Gary was there and he was sold one first. It was an ES-5, which Gary either bought straight off or bought from Greg, when Greg didn't want it. Gary also tried the Strat and even just acoustically was like, 'Oh my God, it's incredible. I haven't even plugged it in.' But the deal was that it was there just for Greg to have a look at. But Gary was like, 'Just listen to that.' He knew that if it was that resonant acoustically, when you plug it in, it is just going to be louder, isn't it?

"So Greg turns up, has a look at it. Gary said he had his fingers crossed thinking, 'Please don't buy it. Please don't buy it.' After a bit of deliberation Greg passed on it, because it was maybe just a little bit too beaten up for his tastes. Obviously not as beaten up as it is now – but it wasn't totally pristine even then. So Gary was like, 'Right, that's mine.' That was it: the deal was done.

"Gary had it from then on," Graham continues. "He did most of *Corridors Of Power* with it and he was playing it a lot live, around that time. Then it was on pretty much most of the next album – *Victims Of The Future* – and sporadically from then on. Then it went missing on its way to America. Whether it disappeared in this country, or strayed when it arrived in America, no-one is sure. But somehow it resurfaced somewhere in Texas. At any rate, it was found and sent back. But by then, Gary had bought two '62 Fender reissues off-the-peg – a white one and a sunburst one. We've still got one of those, which is now [refinished in] pale blue.

"I'm not sure if that was the sunburst one or if that was the white one, because there were two and they both changed colours. One did become very flamingo pink at one point. We won't talk about that one – it was too pink! It was Barbie pink, beyond Barbie. That's long gone as well. But the red '61 Strat was part of his armoury pretty much ever since, really – but most notably, when he played a cover of *Red House* for Fender's 50th anniversary of the Strat gig. I think that goes down in history as one of the greatest performances of that song ever. I just remember looking round at people's faces after he did the first solo. It was just like, 'What happened? Did the Queen walk in?'"

Close scrutiny of Gary's famous Strat reveals that it is not in anything like original condition, and Graham says it was likely to have been a hard-working professional instrument even before Gary bought it, with all the maintenance and upgrades that usually entails.

"It was refretted quite early on. Just jogging back slightly, the supposed history of the guitar was that it came from the sideman in Tommy Steele's band, although I cannot find out anything about him. And obviously, it had been resprayed and refinished at some point. What was it originally? John Cruz of Fender's Custom Shop wasn't certain, but he said with the kind of yellow primer base that's visible in places it could have been sunburst originally. To confuse matters further, the top coat of 'Fiesta' red paint is lighter than another coat of red finish that's visible underneath."

Here we stray back into the long-running debate about the so-called 'Selmer' refinishes, which were purportedly applied to Strats of various factory finishes imported in Britain in the early 60s, then resprayed in an ersatz 'Fiesta Red' because so many players of the era wanted to imitate Hank Marvin.

At this point *Guitar Techniques* editor Neville Marten, who jammed with Gary many times, chimes in with his recollections of working at Fender's UK guitar repair workshop in the early 80s, when many such instruments passed through his hands.

"Everyone who worked in guitar repair in that era knows there were Strats that can only be described as pink and not red. Loads of them were later refinished white because of Hendrix eventually replacing Hank as the guitarist people wanted to be like. But what you found if you went to refinish them again is you couldn't get that pink paint off because it was like *rock*. It was the colour of Lifebuoy Soap as well. That was how we all described it."

While it's impossible to say if Gary's '61 Strat is one such guitar, as Graham points out you can clearly see that a thin, milky-red finish has been sprayed onto a darker coat of red paint underneath. A British respray to 'faux Fiesta' spec

FIRST PLAY

Neville Marten on the first time Gary passed him the Red Strat – and why its neck profile remains its most stunning feature

"The first time I saw this guitar was in a hotel room in London with Gary and Graham [Lilley]", recalls *Guitar Techniques* editor and *Guitarist* contributor Neville Marten, who interviewed and jammed with Gary many times over the years and came to know him quite well. "One funny detail was that I turned up and Gary was wearing a denim shirt. I walked in and he said, 'Fucking hell, Neville. I put a denim shirt on especially, because you always wear denim.' Instead, I was wearing some white shirt with black spots on it, which spoiled his joke – he liked to take the piss out of me, although always in a good-humoured way. By coincidence, I got up this morning and, without thinking about it, put a denim shirt on to come here and play Gary's Strat again, so that's fitting in a way!

"Anyway, going back to the day I first encountered this guitar, Gary was sitting on the sofa with the Strat and he said, 'Do you want to play it?', which of course I did and he passed it to me. I put my hand around the neck and it instantly struck me then, as it always has since, that it was the best Strat neck I have ever held in my hands. I always think about that when I imagine the perfect Strat – because it had that seemingly wide-ish nut. With some guitars you seem to have acres of room on the fretboard and with others your fingers seemed more cramped. It could be to the tune of half a millimetre or what have you, but it seems to make all the difference. People talk about the [slender] '63-shaped neck... I think Gary's Strat is getting towards that, but it might even be shallower, plus it's had 40-odd years of wear and tear on it. [In fact, when building the replica, the Fender Master Builder John Cruz found that the original radius had tangibly flattened off due to playing-wear – Ed]. I was also struck by the fact that Gary's '61 Strat had a very, very dark rosewood 'board. But they all did in those days, didn't they?"

"Gary was pretty on the money. He hit the notes he meant to hit – and they stayed hit. It was the right note at the right time, generally" GRAHAM LILLEY

over an original Dakota Red? Perhaps, but there is no way to be sure. Similarly, the neck and middle pickups are also non-original. Graham explains that, like many hardware changes made on the road, the pickup alterations were wholly pragmatic.

"They just needed redoing. Obviously, when some parts broke they had to be swapped out. For example, we were doing the *A Different Beat* album back in 1998 and the neck pickup went, so I posted it up to Seymour Duncan. He rewound it and sent it back, popped it in and was like, 'Great. Let's go.' Then the middle pickup went in the middle of the *Monsters Of Rock* tour in 2003 at Wembley. I had an old Duncan Antiquity pickup that was sat in a box and just threw that in. But then he didn't use [the Strat] for a quite while. Well, he used it a bit on the *Power Of The Blues* album in 2004. Then it was on a few bits of the last three albums, *Old New Ballads Blues*, *Close As You Get* and *Bad For You Baby*. But the Telecaster was probably used more on a lot of those things.

"All the same, I eventually got Tim Mills at Bare Knuckle Pickups to rewind the original broken middle pickup, which is still in the case, and not in the guitar, at present. Another thing I did, when it proved necessary, was take the rear-most tone pot, which obviously didn't get used that much, and moved that up to replace the volume when that went. I then filled the gap it left with a newer, replacement tone pot. That way you still had that sort of vintage feel because an original part had just been moved up a place."

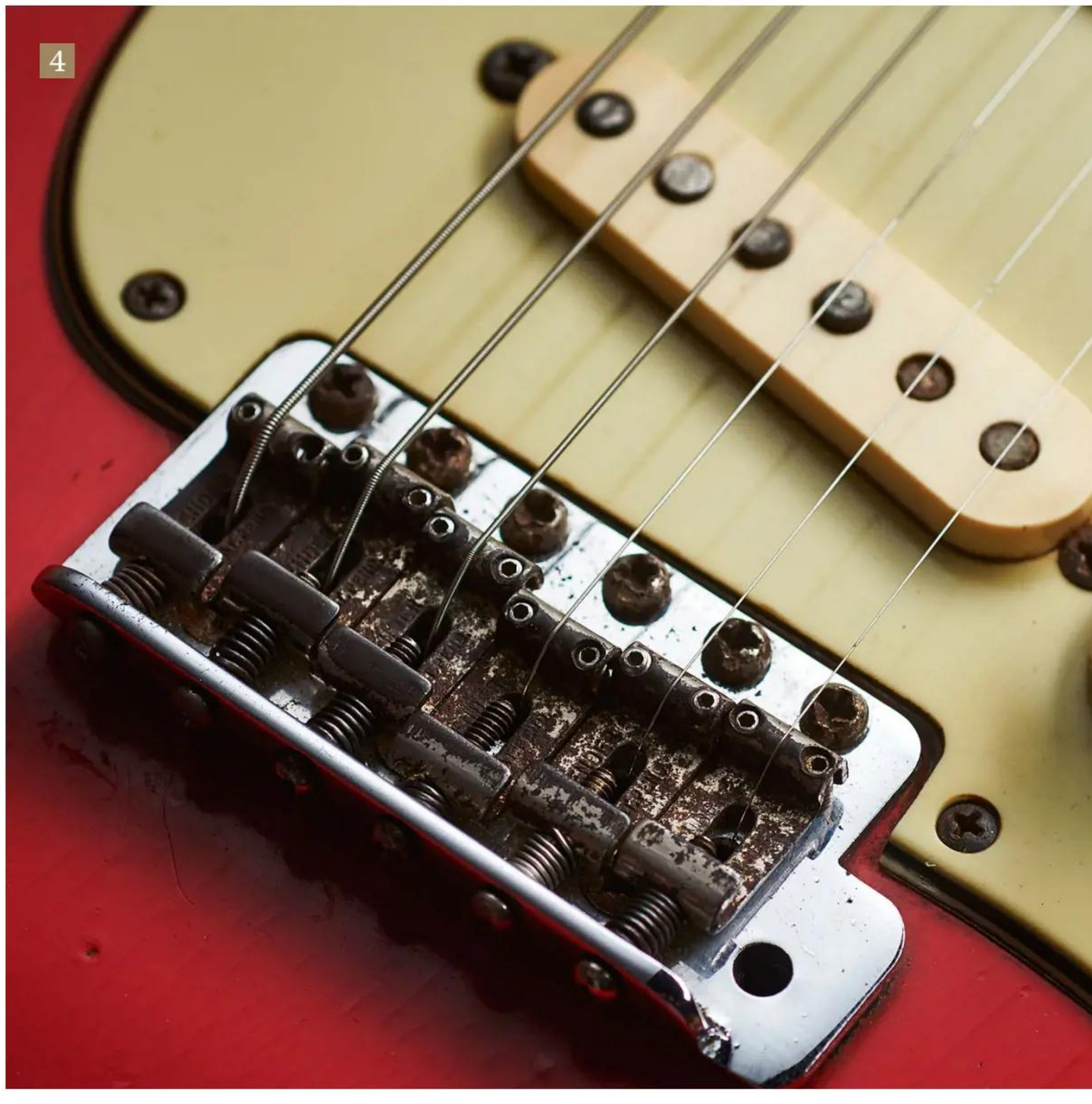
The neck, too – which has a slender, shallow C-profile that graduates smoothly and organically into the diminutive headstock with no apparent step or volute to the flat rear surface of the headstock – saw some pragmatic updates made to it, including refretting with chunky wire to suit Gary's needs.

"It was the biggest wire that Dunlop did at the time, the 6100. Which might upset a few purists, but it works, you know? The intonation would be pretty good on it, because the frets were such a solid lump, you know? So they certainly worked. When it came to the acoustic resonance off the top of [each note]... you would just get even more. But Gary was pretty on the money. He hit the notes he meant to hit – and they stayed hit. It was the right note at the right time, generally."

As the images attest, Gary's '61 Strat bears the battlescars of his high-intensity performances. How much of the heavy wear visible on the Red Strat was put there by Gary in the course of his career, we ask?

"Quite a bit. I was going back through old photographs. It is very noticeable," Graham adds.

1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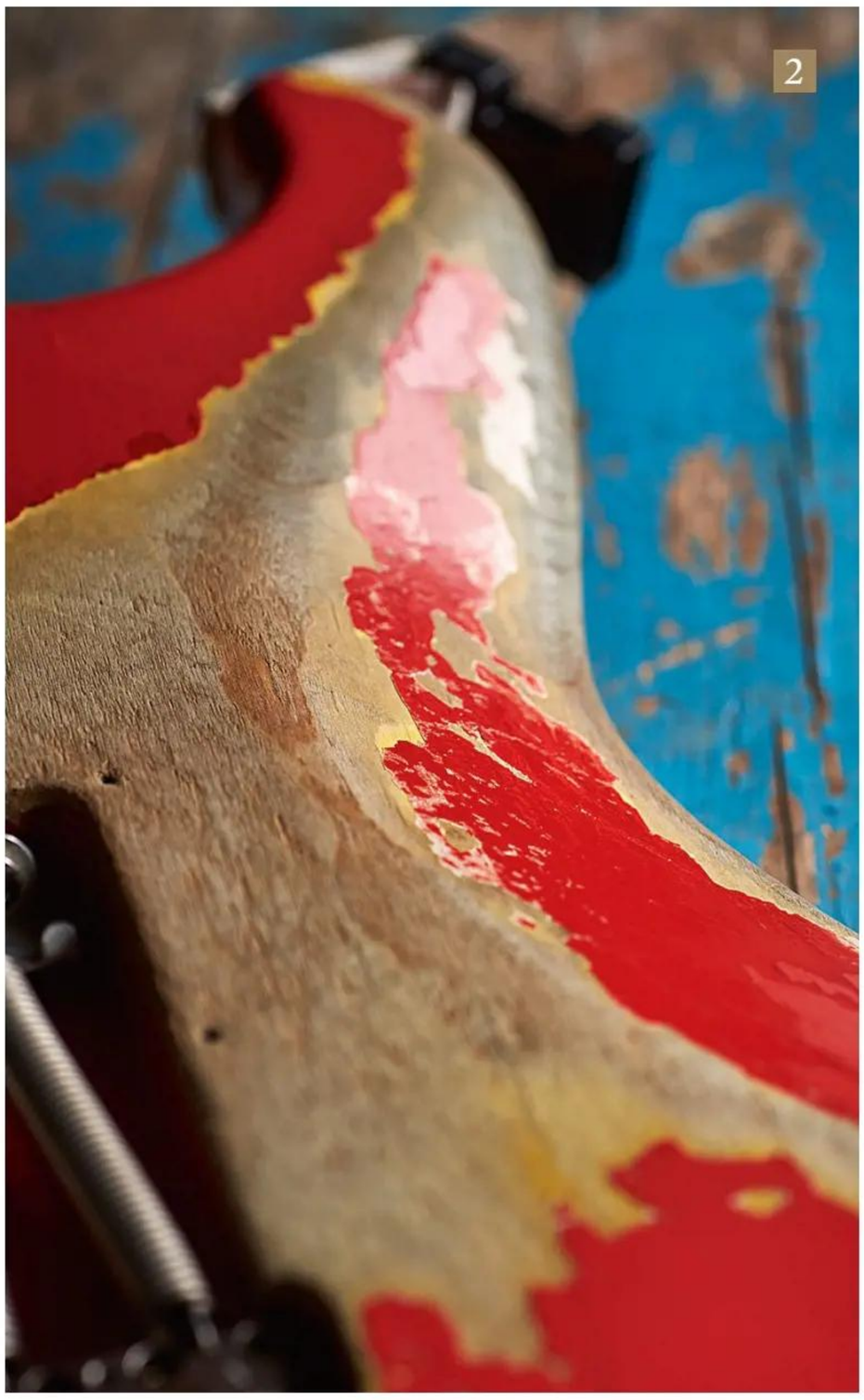

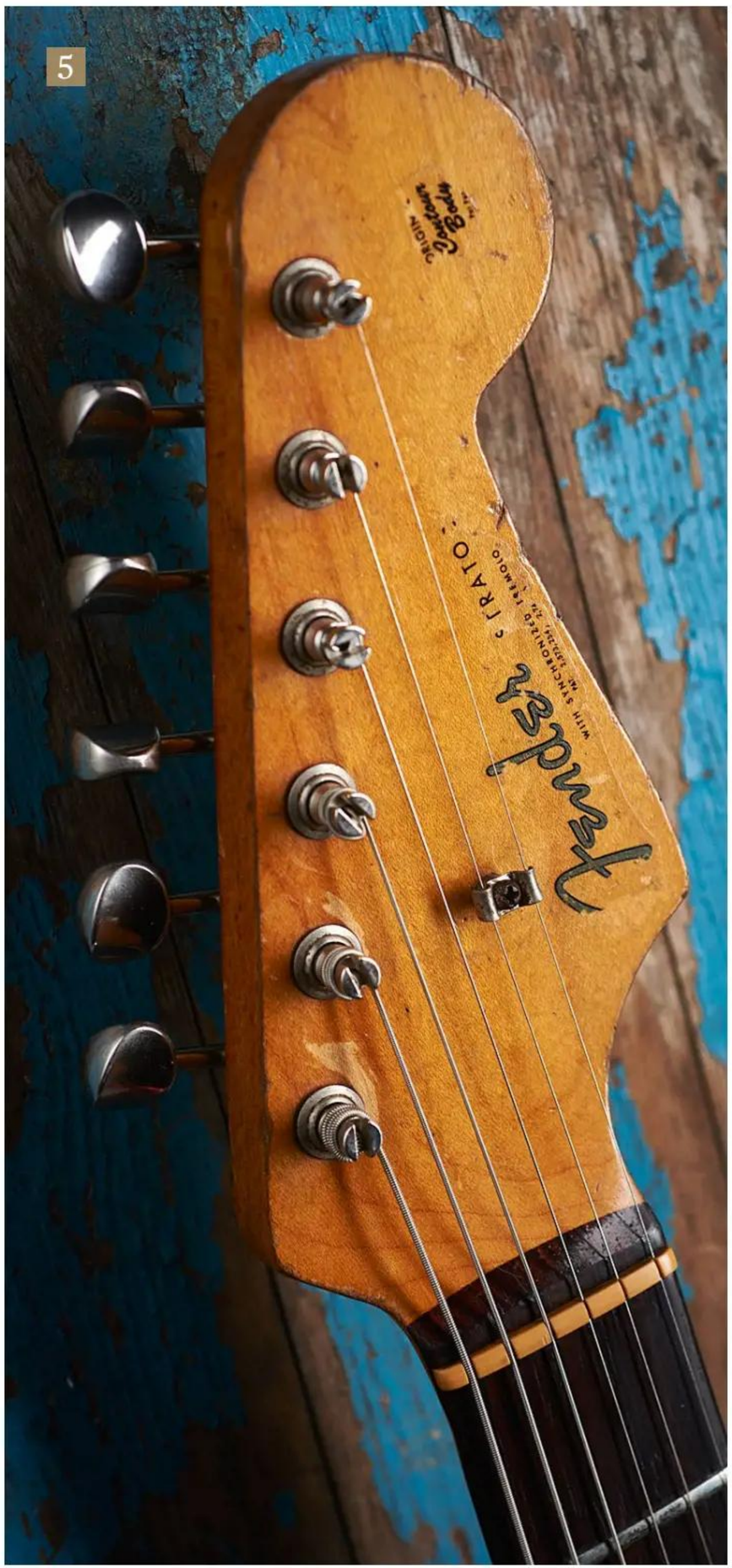

1. A thin, milky-red post-factory finish is clearly visible over a darker-red coat of paint beneath it, with off-white primer beneath that, hinting at a possible British refinish early on in the guitar's life

2. The finish on the rear of the guitar is extensively scoured away by years of use in Gary's hands

3. The neck pickup was rewound by Seymour Duncan in 1998, while the original broken pickup from the middle position was eventually rewound by Bare Knuckle Pickups. A Seymour Duncan Antiquity is installed on the guitar, however

4. The bridge pickup is the only remaining original pickup installed on the guitar today

5. The headstock, bearing a much-darkened spaghetti Fender logo, is quite dainty

6. Three springs were Gary's preference for vibrato setup, though Graham says Gary often used the guitar with vibrato arm removed

7. As with the pickups, pots have been replaced

LEGACY OF LOUD

The recorded voice of the Red Strat is well known to Gary's fans, but it was used with a very wide variety of amplification, as Moore was a restless experimenter with tone, as Graham Lilley explains.

"Gary used the Red Strat with a variety of amps. It was his 1959 100-watt Super Lead Marshalls to begin with, four-input jobs. And also 50-watt Marshall 1987s in various shapes and sizes – big boxes, small boxes – in various vintages. But then he used all sorts of stuff. Like on the *Scars* album he was going through Marshalls and Fender Tonemasters on a couple of occasions.

"The Strat also got used on *Still Got The Blues* on *Too Tired*, a track he did with Albert Collins and it's the slide on *Moving On*, even though for live we used a different guitar – a bog-standard Squier Strat – but it's on the video, and that would be through the Soldano SLO100 with the EV 412s, so there's another colouration to it.

"But there was also those little Plexi combos he got off Denis Cornell. We were using a couple of those things, little 2x12 Vibroverb '62 reissues got used. There was also a 'blackface' 1963 Fender Twin on parts of the *King Of The Blue*s track on the S*till Got The Blues* CD. There was a Prosonic that got tried for a couple of things. Mostly studio, not live because obviously those small combos wouldn't quite cut it. Then there was an anniversary Marshall – not the

1. The neck of the '61 original blends smoothly and organically into the headstock – recalling guitarist Jim Campilongo's pithy observation that this fragile but elegant point of transition on vintage Fenders resembles "an old lady's wrist". The neck is stamped November '60

2. As mentioned, the neck and middle pickups of Gary's '61 Strat are not in original condition, but the bridge pup is. The DC resistance readings are 6.5k (neck), 5.9k (middle) and 5.3k (bridge)

3. Original and volume pots have either been replaced outright as needed or moved up by one slot to fill a gap left by the removal of a faulty original

HOW THEY COMPARE

Our initial impressions of these two glorious guitars plugged in

Given the uniqueness of Gary's Strat and the scarcity of the new John Cruz replica, we were privileged to be able to get both in the same room to make a plugged-in comparison, playing through a Gear Of The Year-winning Fender '57 Custom Tweed Twin. Our test pilot was Neville Marten, who had already played Gary's Red Strat around 10 years ago. Here's what Nev had to say about how the two guitars compare: "They are very similar in weight – there isn't an obvious difference in that regard. The neck on the '61 has worn totally smooth, however. It's like running our fingers over silk. To say you can 'feel edges' on the replica is not correct, because it's been aged and fettled very skillfully, but 40 years of playing means there isn't the faintest suggestion of a hard edge or even a corner or anything, anywhere on Gary's Strat.

"Sonically, the reissue was a touch more powerful than the original – it went into natural feedback and sustain quicker than Gary's did, which could be a plus if that's what you're after. But crucially, the tonal similarity between the two guitars is definitely there. Both played really great and there was no significant difference in that regard.

"In conclusion, the replica is a stunning piece of work and a superb guitar in its own right. The ageing was incredibly accurate, and while you could produce a micrometer and find small differences here and there, I would never, ever feel short-changed by the essential accuracy – leaving aside one or two deliberate differences such as the pickups, as the poles have a different stagger on the replica. As for Gary's '61, I would count it among the top three or four Strats I've ever played. And, weirdly, Gary's natural-finish 'bitsa' one that I played back in issue 403 was one of the other great Strats I've played! He could certainly pick a good one!"

4. The headstock of the replica is superbly aged, though if we're splitting hairs, it looks to be fractionally larger than that of the original

5. Detailing includes a recreation of Gary's quick-release DiMarzio ClipLock strap

6. The milky, thin refinish over a darker (possibly Dakota Red) original finish has been carefully emulated on John Cruz's Master Built replica

"He would use wildly different guitars, from Strats to Teles to Les Pauls to 335s, Gretsches, even... yet he could make it all sound good"

NEVILLE MARTEN

Silver Jubilee, but a thing they did later, which was celebrating Jim Marshall's 85th birthday, the 1923C. It was a great-sounding combo – the sound was a variation of the DSL50, but it was slightly different. They were quite good. And then live was another thing: when we did the *After The War* tour back in '89 we had 400 watts of Marshalls literally all the way upon stage!"

Neville Marten additionally observes that "all that goes to show he would use wildly different guitars, from Strats to Teles to Les Pauls to 335s, Grestches even... And he'd be playing them into all those different amps of different powers based on 6V6s, EL34s, 6L6s... yet he could make it all sound good because of what was coming out of the muscles in his fingers and his brain."

"And his heart," Graham Lilley interjects.

"Yes, and his heart," Neville continues adding that, for Gary, picking up a guitar had a transformational effect. "If he was sitting in a room and talking just like we are around this table, and you stuck a guitar in his hand it would be like flicking a switch. You could say he turned from David Banner into the Incredible Hulk as soon as you put a guitar in his hand... He suddenly became this hugely powerful ox-like presence that was undefeatable – and he was. Nobody would take Gary on in guitar in any contest. Not that he was thinking that way."

"The guitar was almost like his armour," Graham Lilley concurs. "In some ways he was very shy and a little awkward. People say, 'Really?' when I tell them that, but yes, he was very shy. He put that Strat on and it was a buffer between him and the rest of the world, and he could just express himself through that."

CUSTOMS BARRIER

Gary's '61 Strat has a special place in the hearts of many of his fans, for obvious reasons, but in and of itself, it's a guitar that resonates with many British players particularly, given that a Fiesta Red Strat (refinished or otherwise) of this vintage encapsulates the boyhood aspirations of so many Hank Marvin-inspired players. So it seems an obvious subject for a Fender Custom Shop replica – nonetheless, the project was to have a lengthy gestation period, as Graham Lilley explains.

"I'd been having a conversation with John Cruz from Fender's Custom Shop for a good while – 20 or more years. Probably longer now, actually, because Gary has been gone six years come February. So it was

GARY MOORE
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Fender®
Date 09/01/16
This document certifies that this Fender Musical Instrument,
Model Gary Moore Stratocaster
Serial # JC2952
is a product of the Fender Custom Shop in Corona, California.
This instrument has been custom built by Fender's finest craftsmen to bring you years of playing enjoyment.
Thank you for purchasing Fender's best.
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GARY MOORE
BLUES FOR JIMI

prior to that. We sort of kept in touch and discussed it and John, being a huge fan of Gary's, had always wanted to do something, whether it was a special order someone was asking for or something, he wanted to do this model one day. I think, initially, he couldn't get it past head office, because Gary wasn't quite a household name in America. Among guitar players, obviously... For us, it is a different case. But the average man on the street might only remember him from an episode of *Top Of The Pops* standing next to Phil [Lynott].

"So for a while, there was a wait to get the Custom Shop management on side, to make it attractive as a worthwhile project. Obviously, in certain quarters of the globe it would have been snapped up very readily – here, or in Japan or Germany especially. But John and I kept in touch and sent ideas back and forth via fax. This goes back a long way – to transatlantic phone calls and so on. It'd be like, 'What do you need? I have got this vinyl or this picture of it, if it helps?' And so on. So we just had this ongoing conversation.

"Eventually, John said, 'I think we can move forward on it. Let me see if I can get the green light on this.' Then he said, 'Yes, I am going to come over. Let's have a look at it and see what we can do. We will spend a day carefully taking it apart, measuring it, taking photos, getting the colour right.' So we did that last May. As I say, he came over early April this year with a prototype and went back. He went on to take the prototype to the Gary Moore Memorial Concert in Budapest, and played it on stage with the house band as part of the evening's concert."

MASTER STROKE

At this point, the story shifts back in time and West in location to Fender's Custom Shop headquarters in Corona, California, which *Guitarist* visited back in July. While we were there, we chatted with veteran Master Builder John Cruz who actually had the prototype of the replica Gary Moore Stratocaster featured in this article sitting on his workbench at that time. Tellingly, the tricky-to-nail milky-red finish was set to undergo a further revision before production, after careful A/B analysis of minute paint-chips from the original guitar revealed a slight darkening would be necessary to provide an exact match. As John was one of the Custom Shop's most experienced builders and a huge Gary Moore fan, we asked how much of a labour of love the project had been – and what efforts he'd made to evoke both the spirit and the detail of the original in his Master Built replica instrument.

"We went out to London to take a look at the guitar and Graham Lilley brought the guitar in and I sat down with him. I was particularly nervous about it, just seeing it for the first time since I saw him last. I got to see it; I got all shaky, man, it's like, 'Jesus, there it is,' and it was really wonderful to have the opportunity to examine it up close and take it all apart. I got pictures and video and everything.

"For example, it has a lot of really weird neck-wear that I've never seen on any guitar before – it has these black things on it and I'm not actually exactly sure what that was, but I replicated it, right down to the grain of the wood and density and everything. I do kind of wish they would have let me have the guitar to work on it here, though. Like, I had Rory Gallagher's guitar here for four months. So I got to make the prototype one-to-one with the guitar and it was identical. But, all the same, the Gary Moore Strat is pretty much spot on."

Although the pickups on the replica have a different stagger to those on the original, they are carefully voiced to match the sound of the original, says John.

"The pickups on Gary's guitar were on the low side, output-wise, as Strats go, and a couple of pickups have been rewound. So are we going to go to that extent? Probably not. So I had a set custom-wound here, matching those readings that I got and they're basically my pickups. They're things that I use already. They're similarly low-output pickups – which I swear by now. I used to be one of those guys who was like, 'The higher the [DC resistance] readings the better. More output. But now I've kind of turned around – the lower output pickups, that's the real deal. It's clean. It sounds great. You put an overdrive on it, it's just going to explode and come alive."

The results can be judged overleaf, in Dave Burrluck's review of John's exacting replica. While such guitars are produced in prohibitively small numbers and at a price that excludes most players, all 50 of the run of Gary Moore Strats have already been sold – testament to John's obsessive attention to the craft of replication, which he says is his natural calling as a guitar maker.

"I never got to see the original SRV Number One. It was a project that was supposed to go to [Senior Master Builder] John English, but he was too busy at the time to do it and that's when [former Custom Shop head] Mike Eldred came to me. He said, 'What do you think about doing this?' and he showed me the pictures and I'm like, 'Give me that,' and I grabbed the body and the neck, and I ran through paint and I made a prototype and then we showed it to Jimmie Vaughan and he signed off on it. So I knew that was going to be my niche – doing one-to-one replicas – and so that's how it's been ever since."

LEFT
Former Master Builder John Cruz, pictured at his workbench in Fender's Custom Shop in 2016. In his arms is a prototype of the Gary Moore replica Strat featured here

OPPOSITE
As you'd expect for such an expensive replica, there's a fair bit of case candy here – plus the heavy-duty flight case itself

FENDER GARY MOORE STRAT

It might be a slavish repro of the late, great man's Stratocaster, but here we ask the question, as a new guitar at £8,000, how does Fender's Limited Edition Gary Moore Stratocaster really stack up?

All Strats are the same, right? If only. It's a testament to the design of this all-time classic that models of a similar price level can sound, play and feel, remarkably different. You find a good one then, dammit, you play another that trumps it. Throw in the diverse range of styles that the Strat has excelled in, in the hands of a diverse number of players, and you have a seemingly simple instrument that can be annoyingly slippery to define.

So with just 27 of these £8k Gary Moore tributes coming to Europe, how does it fit into this world? This writer was dispatched to Fender's Artist centre at John Henry's rehearsal complex, with no knowledge of Gary's original Strat, to take a look.

As we examine the guitar we notice the enhanced contours with different colour undercoats – both white and a yellow – plus, on the forearm contour, the darker Dakota Red shows through the Fiesta Red. The neck-wear is interesting, too, in that although it's worn away on the treble and bass side, there's visible lacquer on the centre back – another indicator that many 'heavy' relics really aren't that accurate: this is a replica of a guitar that has obviously been played at a high pro-level. The wear on the rear of the guitar not only approximates the original, but looks very real. It's a convincing piece.

Some players might be surprised at its relatively thin neck depth in lower positions, which fills out up the neck and measures 19.4mm at the 1st fret and 22.8mm at the 12th. Of course, some of that might be down to the flattening of the original's fingerboard radius over the numerous refrets – it would have been 7.25 inches originally; now it's spec'd at 10 inches – which obviously slightly reduces the neck depth.

There's a typically 'old' ring and resonance to the acoustic voice; the vibrato is set with three springs and approximately one tone upbend on the G string. We'd taken along our well-used Road Worn Strat as our reference and, as you'd perhaps expect, the Gary Moore has a noticeably more vibrant response.

Now, DC resistance readings aren't the best indication of what's happening with the pickups, but here we measured the bridge at 5.76kohms, the middle at 6.03k and the neck at 5.78k, far from the modern thinking of a 'graduated' set where, typically, the bridge is the hottest. And plugged in, the bridge really has quite a low-output, edgy sound that's beautifully contrasted by the neck pickup. The surprise, perhaps, is the close voicing of the neck and middle pickups; for example, through a crunchy, gained Bassbreaker on lower-string voicings, the difference is minimal, but past the 12th fret lead lines on the top strings sound profoundly different.

The appeal then, from a new-guitar standpoint, is this tonal width and contrast – each pickup has its own character and nuance and there's a sweetness to the bridge that sounds edgy and wiry, but far from weedy. Also, the pickup heights are a little different from how many of us would set them: the bridge, as set, has virtually no tilt – it's approximately 2mm from the strings (fretted at the top fret) on both treble and bass sides, while the middle pickup is, despite it's beefiest DC reading, set the closest to the strings, again with relatively little tilt.

To a collector and/or Gary Moore fanatic, it's probably worth the cost, although we struggle to justify that kind of money without the guitar's backstory. It is, however, one of the most realistic Relics we've played; the attention to the smallest details is impressive, not to mention its 'old guitar' resonance and feel. But it's the pickups and sounds that intrigue us: that low-output bridge pickup really works, adding subtle and very wide dynamic range to the instrument.

VERDICT

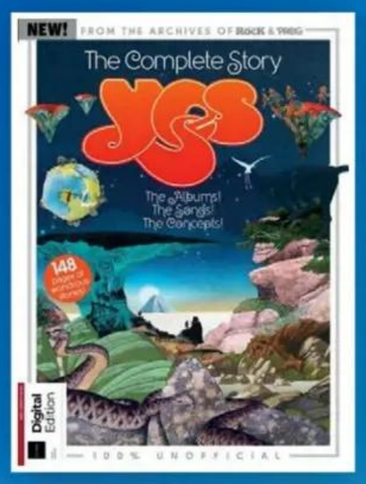
It can be a depressing experience to play a guitar as good as this (not least because our own go-to Strat now feels and sounds inferior in comparison). We might not be able to stretch up to a Master Built any time soon, but this guitar's pickup specs, settings and three-way pickup switch have given us plenty to think about on the way home. Like we say, not all Strats are created equal!

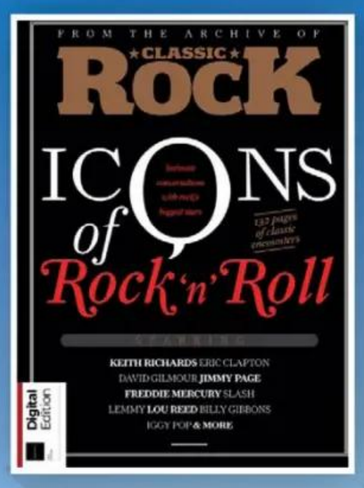
TECH SPEC

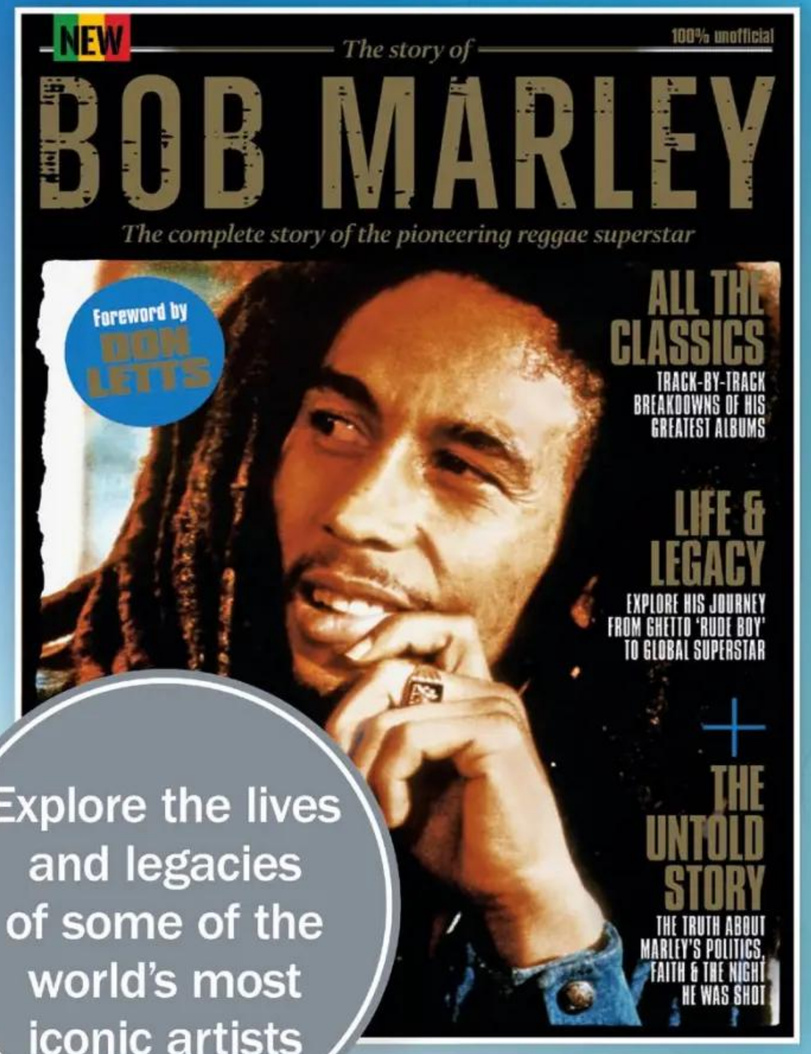
PRICE: £8,000
BODY: 2-piece offset seam lightweight alder
NECK: Maple, custom Oval 'C' profile, bolt-on
SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")
NUT/WIDTH: Bone/41.9mm
FINGERBOARD: Select dark African blackwood, 254mm (10") radius
FRETS: 21, jumbo
HARDWARE: Aged nickel-plated American Vintage vibrato, Fender vintage-style tuners
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 55mm
ELECTRICS: 3x Custom Shop John Cruz-designed Bone-Tone single coils, 3-position lever pickup selector switch, master volume, tone 1 (neck), tone 2 (middle)
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.6/8
FINISHES: Colour-matched Fiesta Red custom Relic nitro lacquer (body), Custom Relic tinted nitro lacquer (neck)

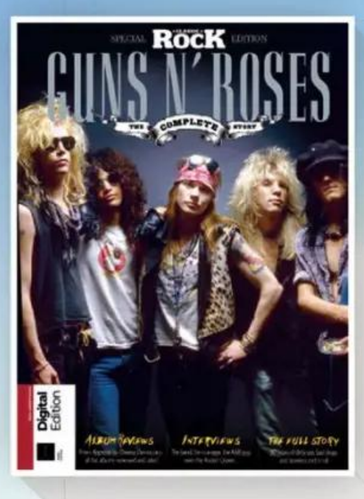
The John Cruz Master Built Gary Moore Stratocaster is a thing of beauty, though its price is prohibitively high for most players

Celebrate the songs and sounds of the greatest decades in music









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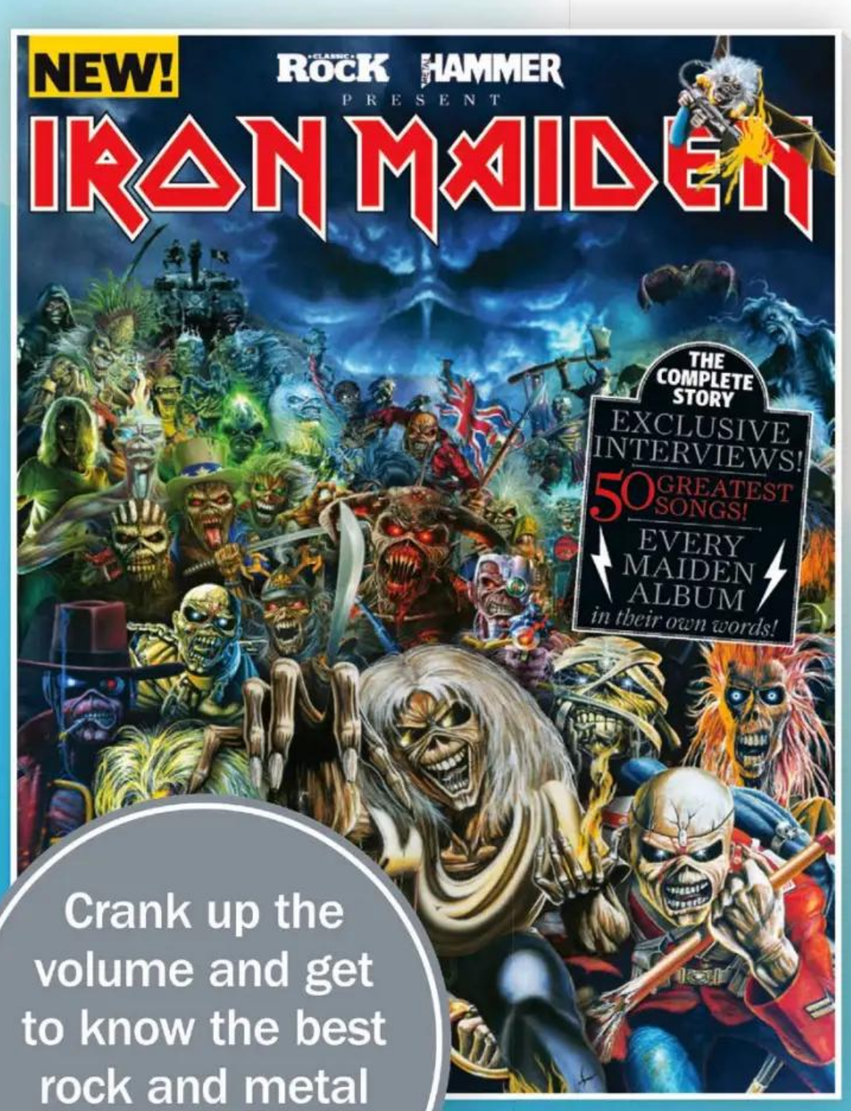

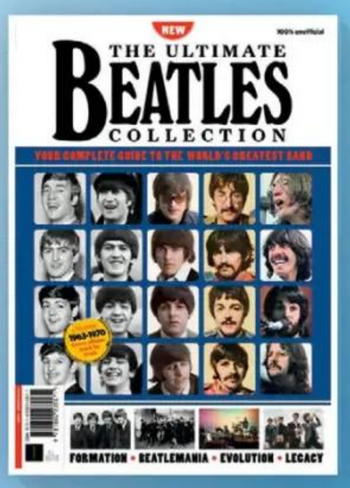

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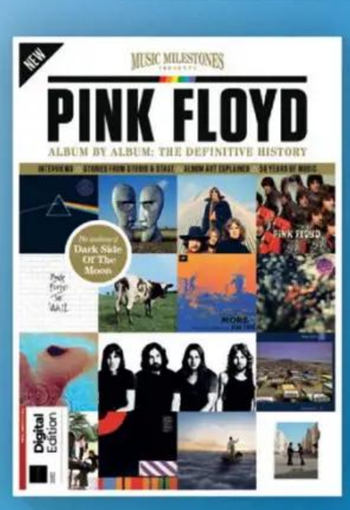

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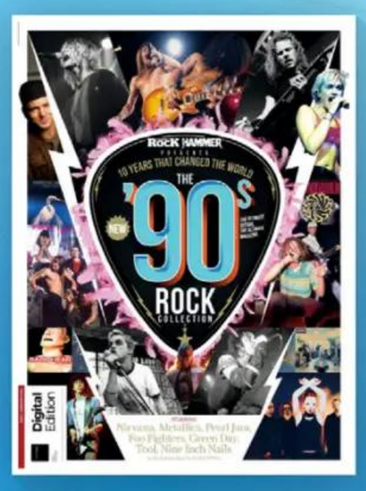

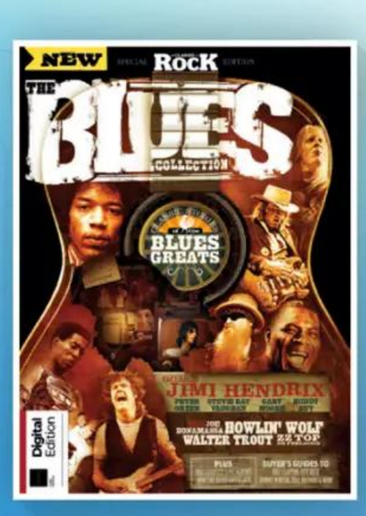

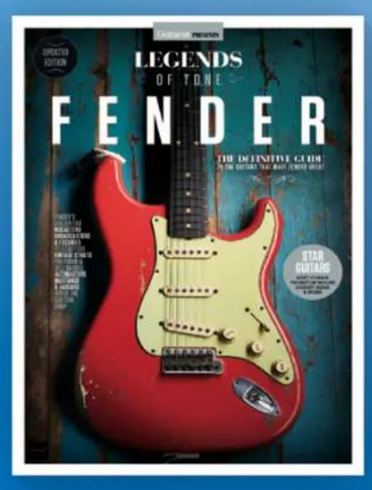

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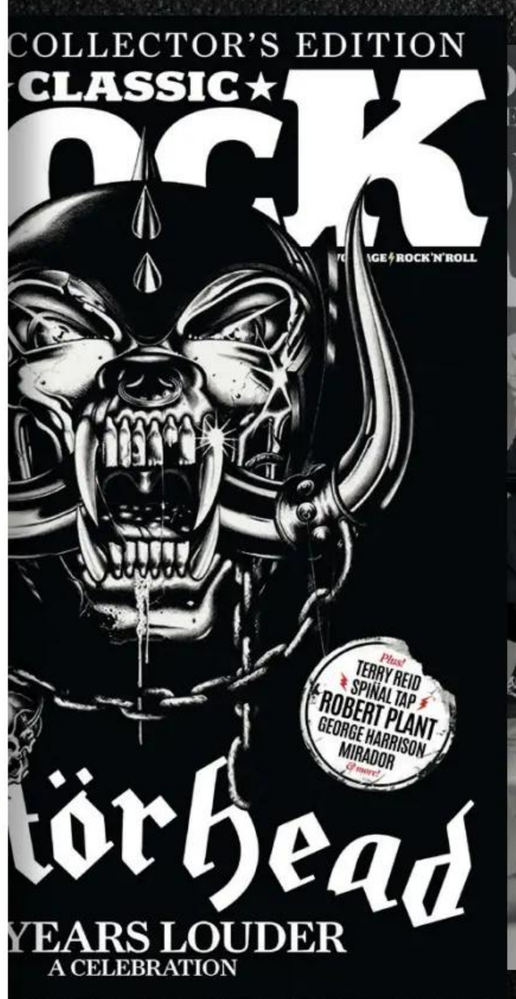

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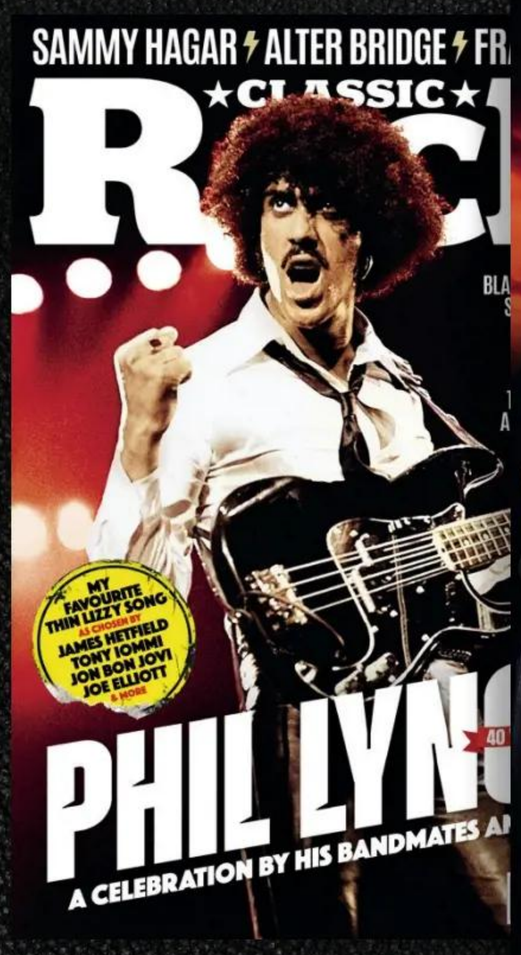

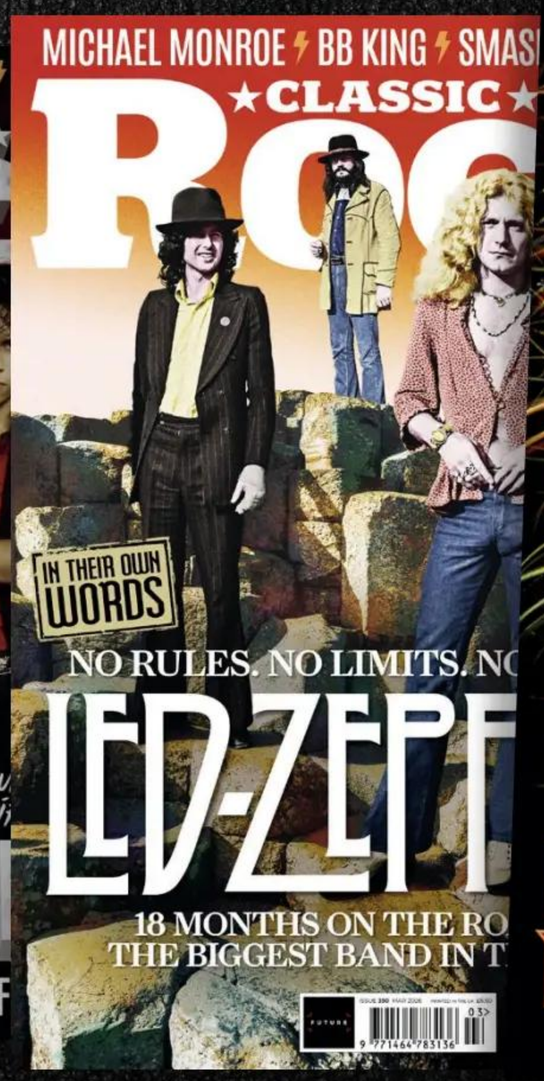

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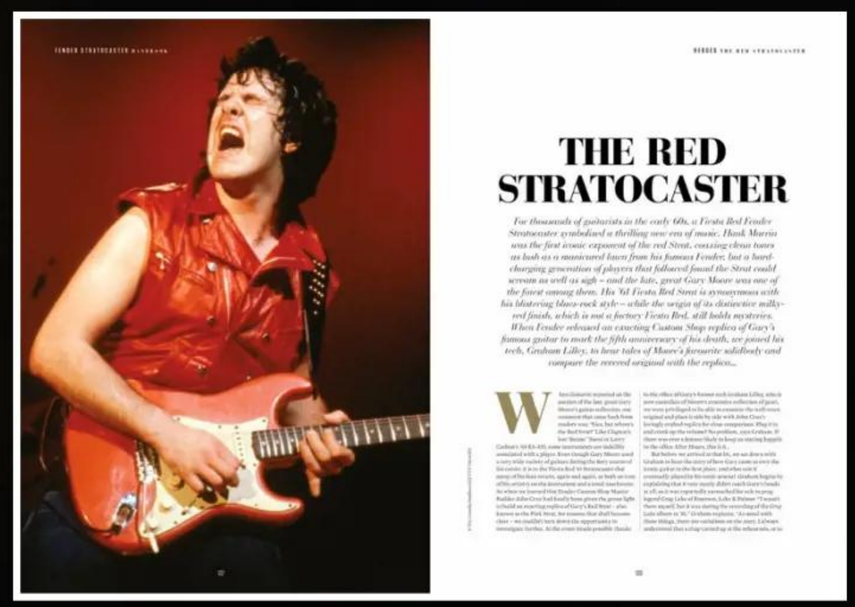

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