

Words Jonathan Horsley / Photography Neil Godwin

VERSATILE SOLIDBODIES

Marrying humbucking power to crisp single-coil cut, these crowd-pleasing, high-spec electrics are built to do it all



We guitarists each have our own individual gear needs, with some features essential to our playing. But when shelling out £500 plus for a solid-bodied electric, in expectation of an instrument with heaps of pro-quality features, the mind wanders. We imagine, or rather, we remember all the different styles that we'd like to play, all the tonal options that might not be mission-critical but are, nonetheless, hugely desirable. This month's round-up is for all those wracked with doubts: the metal head who plays Talking Heads covers in a wedding band, the session players, the teachers – and those who haven't really

decided on what sort of guitarist they want to be. Perhaps that's most of us. These guitars are spec'd for versatility, with coil-splitting humbuckers offering a wide spectrum of tone, and all are eminently playable. We have a Yamaha Pacifica 611 VFMX, a Charvel Pro Mod San Dimas Style 2 HH HT, Schecter Banshee-6 Extreme and a Fender Deluxe Stratocaster HSS. The Pacifica and the Strat are ubiquitous standard bearers, thoughtfully retooled, while Charvel and Schecter prove that you can build a guitar to shred and retain a softer underbelly for blues, soul, funk... whatever. Sometimes the 'whatever' is what we wanted all along.





FENDER DELUXE STRATOCASTER HSS

£739

Old-school Fender tone

Wait, this is just a Strat, right? So what exactly makes it special?

The electronics, for starters. The H/S/S pickup configuration is hardly the acme of iconoclasm but via the S-1 Switch you can split the humbucker's signal, giving you access to the sort of single-coil snap that the Stratocaster made its name on. Also, a set of locking tuners allows you to abuse the two-point vibrato unit.

What is the deal with S-1 switch?

It's a coil-split, but instead of pulling the pot up you press this



discreet little button that's housed in the volume control. Pretty cool, don't you think? Yes, we thought so too. It selects the rear coil of the bridge humbucker, wherein you'll find rich reserves of American twang.

Does it sound authentic?

As in, authentically Fender? Of course it does. The Deluxe is the most vintage-voiced of this month's group test, an alder-bodied beaut that's an incredible option for blues, rock 'n' roll, and classic rock – especially if you crank the gain up on that humbucker. The Deluxe will please fans of Buddy Guy and Def Leppard alike.

AT A GLANCE

KEY FEATURES: Alder body, bolt-on maple neck, 647.7mm (25.5") scale, maple fretboard, 22 frets, 1 x Twin Head Vintage humbucker (bridge) and 2 x Vintage Noiseless single-coil pickups, S-1 coil-split, locking tuners, two-Point synchronised tremolo with bent steel saddles

FINISH: Blizzard Pearl [as reviewed], Candy Apple Red, Sunburst Maple

CONTACT: Fender.com / 0845 305 1122



SCHECTER BANSHEE-6 EXTREME

£499

Scream for me

It's named the Banshee Extreme. I can't play Coldplay on that...

Of course you can. Setting aside the moody noir Charcoal Burst finish and sharp edges, this S-style electric has a hell of a tonal range. Think Al Di Meola jazz fusion, elastic funk, and blues. The Banshee is a screamer but it can tone it down for the gentle pianissimo moments when the occasion takes you.

Hey, we've visited Schecter's site, it says: 'designed and built to be played heavy and loud!'

Okay, you got us. We'll admit that Schecter has tooled this for war,



aiming primarily at the metal players out there. That Diamond Series bridge humbucker is hot and punchy, an all-round great pickup for hard rock and metal that's not unlike a Seymour Duncan JB-1.

It looks flash with the quilted maple and the abalone, but does it play flash?

The Banshee-6 has an unfinished maple neck that's cut thin in a C-profile and has 24 extra-jumbo frets that reward the lightest of touches; aspiring shredders will love it. This is definitely a guitar that flatters you.

AT A GLANCE

KEY FEATURES: Mahogany body with quilted maple top, bolt-on maple neck, 647.7mm (25.5") scale, rosewood fretboard with Pearlloid and Abalone Vector inlay, 24 extra-jumbo frets, 1 x Schecter Diamond Series humbucker (bridge) and 2 x Schecter Diamond Series single coils with coil-split, Schecter Custom hard-tail bridge

FINISH: Charcoal Burst Black Cherry

CONTACT: Schecterguitars.com / 0844 326 2000



CHARVEL PRO-MOD SAN DIMAS STYLE 2 HH HT

£769

A hot-rodded dream machine

We've been hearing about this 'no-load tone' control... what's it all about then?

Well, it means that from positions one through to nine the tone control acts as a normal tone control: roll it back and you can take some of the highs off, bringing out a little woody piano vibe, or whatever takes your fancy really. Turn the knob all the way up to 10, however, and you take the tone control right out of the game. Doing this takes the tone pot's resistance out of the signal path and allows the guitar's natural voice to ring clear. Pretty cool. Suffice to say that Yngwie Malmsteen is a fan.



That headstock looks familiar...

It sure does. It's a Fender Stratocaster headstock, used under license, and it's typical of Charvel's MO. They started cannibalising other electric guitars in order to custom build the ultimate shredder's guitar. Allied to the T-style body, the headstock feels true to Charvel's custom shop vibe.

And what about the pickups?

Well, how does a classic combo of a Seymour Duncan JB TB-4 trembucker in the bridge and '59 SH-1N grab you... By the wallet, surely, as pairings don't come much better than that.

AT A GLANCE

KEY FEATURES: Alder body with quilted maple top, bolt-on maple neck, 647.7mm (25.5") scale, 304mm (12") to 406mm (16") maple fretboard, 22 jumbo frets, 1x Seymour Duncan JB-1 humbucker (bridge) and 1x Seymour Duncan '59 humbucker (neck), coil-split, Charvel HT6 6-String hard-tail bridge

FINISH: Chlorine Burst [as reviewed]

CONTACT: Charvel.com / 0845 305 1122



YAMAHA PACIFICA 611 VFMX

£755

Play anything again, Sam

Isn't the Yamaha Pacifica a beginner's guitar?

Not necessarily. The Pacifica was introduced as a multi-purpose tone beast in 1990 and has been ubiquitous at pretty much every price point since. This 611 VFMX is a real player's guitar, with a pro-quality tone that session players would dream of.

What makes it sound so good?

As with the Charvel, there's a great pickup pairing from Seymour Duncan, with a Custom 5 Trembucker in the bridge position and a Vintage soapbar single coil in the neck, and they are seated in a



lovely piece of alder with a maple veneer. The Custom 5 is like a supercharged Seymour Duncan '59, with a thick, scooped tone, while the P-90-style single coil is full of charisma.

How stable is that vibrato?

It's very stable. Trevor Wilkinson sure knows how to engineer a vibrato. And while the VS50 might be a budget version of the VS100, it is similarly an admirable work of neat minimalism, boasting a steel-base plate and solid-steel saddles. With a set of locking Grover tuners, you'll have absolutely no worries at all about throwing it out of tune.

AT A GLANCE

KEY FEATURES: Alder body with maple veneer, bolt-on maple neck, 647.7mm (25.5") scale, 1x Seymour Duncan Custom 5 humbucker (bridge) and 1x Seymour Duncan SP90-1N (neck), TUSQ-XL nut, Grover locking tuners

FINISH: Trans Black [as reviewed], Root Beer, Transparent Blue, Tobacco Brown Sunburst

CONTACT: UK.Yamaha.com / 020 8962 5080



HEAD TO HEAD

And the finest versatile solidbody of them all is...

With its round-up rivals each drawing inspiration from its design (to some degree), the Stratocaster Deluxe is a logical place to start any comparison. Like the Charvel, it is carved from alder, assembled in Mexico and shares a headstock profile. Also like the Charvel, it is a little different. The Deluxe's pickup configuration isn't so avant garde: think Adrian Smith, Iron Maiden – but with the coil-split it lets you have it both ways. With the neck or middle pickups selected you'll find classic Stratocaster tones – mother's milk to those who spend their playing time working the blues and pentatonic scales. The bridge single coil is all American treble snap; with the humbucker, it bulks up nicely for classic rock and metal. While the Stratocaster Deluxe feels and sounds old-school the Charvel is an 80s design that's still ahead of its time. Its svelte, ergonomically forgiving neck, anointed with a urethane gel

AT EVERY PRICE POINT THE PACIFICA IS A LOT OF FUN TO PLAY, AND THIS IS NO EXCEPTION

finish, is seriously quick, the T-style body perfectly balanced. The power in its pickups effortlessly accommodates huge metal riffs and pyrotechnic leads, but when you strip back that tonal bulk via the coil-split the Charvel sharpens up, all bright and punchy. It's a trick the Schecter Banshee-6 Extreme knows well. The Banshee's bridge humbucker is similarly at home with high-gain but via a coil-split it can be turned into an all-single coil electric. Its mahogany body with maple top gives it a little more warmth and thickness than its rivals' tone, while it gives the Charvel a run for its money with regards shredability. The Pacifica has more of a classic feel but, at every price point, the Pacifica is a lot of fun to play, and this is definitely no exception. The Custom 5 pickup in the bridge is hot, harmonically rich, and a great foil for the soapbar single coil in the neck. Like the Stratocaster Deluxe, its stable vibrato and locking tuners is a set up that offers fuss-free wobble.



Classic Strat tones from Fender



Charvel pickups suit big metal riffs



Harmonically-rich tones from the Custom 5 pickup

FINAL VERDICT

Which solidbody is the right one for you?

The good news is that you can't go wrong. That said, players with a hankering for a classic tone would do well to go for the Stratocaster Deluxe. In Blizzard Pearl, it's a stunning guitar, with its narrow tall frets, bent steel saddles in the bridge, and pickups all geared towards a heritage instrument feel and sound with the mod cons of a humbucker option. Maybe it lacks a little power for extreme metal but for classic metal crunch it's a doozy. The Pacifica, with that gnarly,

chewy SP90-1N single-coil tone in the neck and the alternating humbucker/single coil of the tappable Custom 5 bridge pickup, might be the one guitar here that plays the whole field; truly an all-purpose option, maybe the only thing it can't do is cook dinner and file your taxes. It sounds like a bespoke custom shop instrument and encourages experimentation with your playing. Still, even the nuclear options, the Charvel and the Schecter, encourage adventure. With a mahogany and maple construction the

Schecter stands proud from the alder-bodied alternatives. Its finish is ostentatious but it backs it up with supreme playability and a thick, warm humbucking tone that can be tapped for a Strat-esque sound, albeit with a little less bite. The Charvel, meanwhile, with its gorgeously-sculpted heel and body, and discreet input jack, is incredible. Like the Schecter, it makes playing easy, but for our money – and yours – that pickup configuration, gives it the edge, with heaps of pro-quality tone on tap.

FENDER DELUXE STRATOCASTER HSS



TOTAL Guitar
BEST FOR RETRO COOL

SCHECTER BANSHEE-6 EXTREME



TOTAL Guitar
BEST VALUE FOR MONEY

CHARVEL PRO-MOD SAN DIMAS STYLE 2



TOTAL Guitar
BEST FOR SHRED

TOTAL Guitar
BEST BUY AWARD

YAMAHA PACIFICA 611 VFMX



TOTAL Guitar
BEST ALL-ROUNDER

TOTAL Guitar
BEST BUY AWARD

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

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	OVERALL RATING	★	★	★	★	★