

FIRST PLAY



**CHARVEL PRO-MOD DK22
SSS 2PT CM**
\$949

WHAT IS IT? An affordable mash-up of modern feel and classic tones in Charvel style

Skin Deep

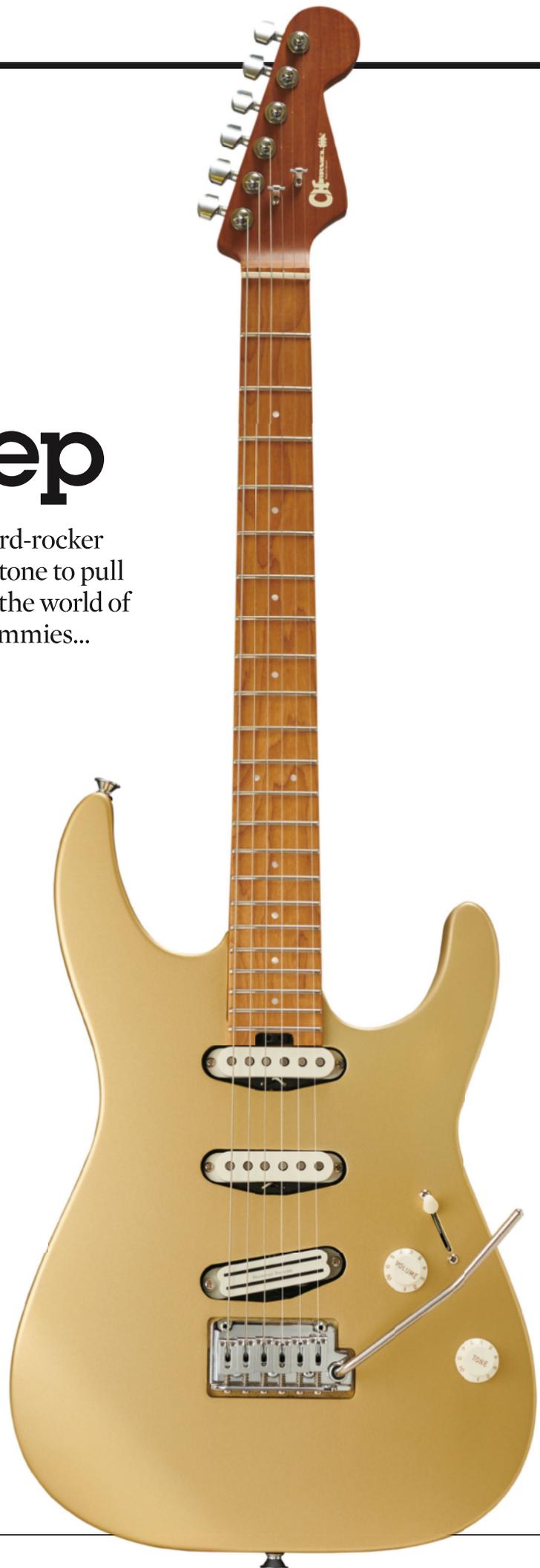
Nevermind the shredders, this hard-rocker from Mexico has enough vintage tone to pull bluesers and country pickers into the world of compound radii and floating whammies...

Words Ed Mitchell **Photography** Neil Godwin

Some electric guitars come with baggage. There's a 'reputation'. Unfair as it may seem, guitars can be judged on the company they keep. We look them up and down and instantly decide whether or not we want anything to do with these characters. Gretsch? Easy. Rockabilly throwbacks. Next. Rickenbacker? Lovable mop tops. Jingle jangle. End of. And what of the Charvel Pro-Mod DK22 minding its own business on this page? C'mon, you'd have to be some bearded slab of tattooed meat to bother shredding on one of those things. Right?

Imagine for a second you got this six-string Goldilocks all wrong. Maybe it isn't just for those who only got a clean sound that one time the battery in their metal pedal fizzled out. With some gentle persuasion on our part you might even begin to regard this guitar as a perfect contemporary interpretation of the Fender Stratocaster. Yeah, we went there. We just need to back it up.

Let's begin by breaking down that model designation. 'Pro-Mod' signifies this guitar is a member of Charvel's affordable Mexican-built range. 'DK' refers to the Dinky body shape, basically a slightly scaled-down Strat-style design, while '22' equals the number of jumbo frets. 'SSS' means you get three single-coil-sized pickups and '2PT' points to the two







1. Charvel's die-cast locking tuners provide faultless tuning stability

2. Our DK22 maple neck is caramelised, a process that involves baking the maple to help it resist changes in temperature and humidity

Rolled fingerboard edges and the compound radius mean you almost feel like the guitar is playing itself



pivot point recessed Gotoh Custom 510 vibrato unit. Finally, 'CM' is shorthand for the 648mm (25.5-inch) scale caramelised maple neck. You've no doubt heard of torried or roasted maple; caramelised means the same thing. The wood is heated in a kiln to remove moisture, which leaves it more stable, not to mention looking beautifully tanned. Here the neck is further reinforced by a pair of graphite rods.

The better-dead-than-shred brigade might assume this guitar has a basswood body like so many modern metal machines. In fact, it's classic Strat-style alder that resides under that satin urethane Pharaoh's Gold finish. The sculpted rear of the Dinky body offers maximum player comfort, while the Strat-style jack plate is cleverly angled upwards to direct your cable over your strap or into a radio pack.

Upper-fret access is excellent thanks to a scoop cut into the rear of the treble

side cutaway, and a rounded body heel that does its best to keep out of your way. As mentioned, you get 22 frets here and they come mounted on a 305 to 406mm (12- to 16-inch) compound radius fingerboard. Yes, that's a particularly 'shred' appointment, but lest we forget Fender's new American Ultra Stratocaster also features a compound radius 'board, albeit one that's 10 to 14 inches. That guitar is also heavily contoured to promote easy upper-fret access. Makes you think.

We love the restraint shown in the hardware choices. Charvel could have chiselled in a double-locking Floyd Rose and still tickled its target markets' fancy. Instead, you get that lower-profile Gotoh Custom 510 vibrato. It's a nice bit of kit. The aforementioned double pivot points make for super-smooth operation, the centre-threaded screw-in arm stays put wherever you leave it, and a set of locking



'heads provides faultless tuning stability. The slippery Graph Tech Tusq XL top nut helps out, too.

Before we plug in, there's the electrical stuff to contend with. The DK22 is a SSS format guitar. In actual fact, it has two regular single coils and a single-coil-sized humbucker. The bridge pickup is a Seymour Duncan SHR-1B Custom Hot Rails humbucker. The middle unit is a Seymour Duncan SSL-6 Flat Strat single coil. The neck position is occupied by another SSL-6, this time 'Reverse Wind, Reverse Polarity' (aka RWRP) to cut hum when used in conjunction with one of the other pickups. Controls include the fast and loose 500k EVH Bourns Low-Friction master volume, a No-Load master tone, and a five-way pickup selector blade switch.

Feel & Sounds

The DK22's neck is slim. We measured it at 19.7mm at the 1st fret and 21.1mm at the octave. Despite that snake-hipped demeanour this Charvel has just about the most stable neck we've ever come across. That's obviously a consequence of the caramelisation process and the graphite reinforcement, but we're still impressed. This thing is built for comfort *and* speed. The rolled fingerboard edges and the compound radius mean you almost feel like the guitar is playing itself.

You can dive-bomb on the DK22 if that's what you're into. The vibrato recess also allows for a decent amount of pull-back. That said, we enjoyed the shimmer and sustain that comes with gently manipulating the vibrato arm back and forth. Using more of a Jeff Beck approach than, say, Steve Vai makes the most of the Gotoh Custom 510's travel. Again, tuning stability never disappoints.

Let's get our heads around the pickup switching options. Position one is the bridge

3. Upper-fret access is fantastic thanks to a scoop on the rear of the treble side cutaway and the rounded neck heel. There's also some contouring on the back of the body to accommodate your ribcage or belly... whichever comes first

4. The Dinky comes spec'd with a sculpted area on the rear bottom body that accommodates a Strat-style recessed jack plate. What makes this so cool is the fact it's angled upwards to direct your guitar cable over your strap button or into a wireless transmitter





There's no shred-friendly double-locking Floyd Rose vibrato here. Instead, you get a recessed Gotoh Custom 510 unit. This vibrato comes paired with a set of locking machineheads and a slippery Graph Tech top nut. The result is faultless tuning stability

It can't be pigeonholed as just another shredding machine, even if that's Charvel's target market

SHR-1B Custom Hot Rails humbucker, both coils engaged. The second click on the switch coil splits the bridge pup to offer the inner coil in partnership with the middle SSL-6 Flat Strat. Number three is the outer coil of the bridge pickup in cahoots with the neck position SSL-6. Four finds the middle and neck single coils also working together. The last position is the neck SSL-6 Flat Strat doing its own thing.

Plugging in, you quickly realise that the DK22 is not some bovver-booted yob with too much to say for itself and absolutely no table manners. Yes, we'd wager direct mounting the bridge pickup has given it a touch more tonal girth than a traditional Strat single coil usually possesses, even in the split modes. Reverse angling it Jimi-style also helps to emphasise the low-end and soften the top E treble, and yet you'll find classic 'glassy' Fender tones here, too. Positions two and four on the switch dial in the much-loved Hendrix 'in-between' tones. Position three comes over like the middle setting on a Telecaster, with a wash of additional warmth.

Adding overdrive naturally ups the aggression of the bridge pickup, but it's definitely more focused sounding than a full size 'bucker. Clarity and note separation are exceptional. Of course, in all positions dialling the No-Load tone control to its highest notched setting reveals some additional presence.

Verdict

You typecast electric guitars at your peril. We all know that Gretsch guitars cut plenty of mustard outside of their supposed comfort zones. That goes for Rickenbacker, too. Similarly, the Pro-Mod DK22 SSS 2PT CM can't be pigeonholed as just another shredding machine, even if that's Charvel's target market.

Yes, we reckon the customer base for this guitar is potentially wider than that. Blues, country, classic rock – whatever turns you a coin, the DK22 has got your back. If this were a Fender American Ultra or a Suhr Classic we wouldn't have to persuade you to relax your prejudices and preconceived notions. Yet this guitar has that same combination of vintage and contemporary appeal – and for much less money.

Bottom line time. The Charvel Pro-Mod DK22 SSS 2PT CM is an exceptionally well-built guitar with fantastic playability and a tonal range that runs from vintage to modern. If ever there was an example of a guitar that should be judged on its tone and feel first, with its looks a distant third, this is definitely it. **G**



CHARVEL PRO-MOD DK22 SSS 2PT CM

PRICE: £949

ORIGIN: Mexico

TYPE: Double-cutaway solidbody electric guitar

BODY: Alder

NECK: 2-piece caramelised maple with hand-rubbed urethane finish, graphite reinforcement and Luminlay side dots, bolt-on

SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")

NUT/WIDTH: Graph Tech Tusq XL/42.86mm

FINGERBOARD: Caramelised maple with rolled edges and small dot inlays, 305-406mm (12-16") radius

FRETS: 22, jumbo

HARDWARE: Chrome recessed Gotoh Custom 510 six-saddle floating bridge with screw-in arm, Charvel die-cast locking tuners

STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 53mm

ELECTRICS: Seymour Duncan SHR-1B Custom Hot Rails humbucker (bridge), SSL-6 Flat Strat single coil (middle), SSL-6 RWRP Flat Strap single coil (neck), master volume, No-Load master tone, five-way pickup selector lever switch

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.4/7.5

OPTIONS: Hard case (£108); padded gigbag (£43)

RANGE OPTIONS: The Floyd Rose-equipped Pro Mod DK24 HH FR twin humbucker with Floyd Rose vibrato and alder or okoume body starts at £899; a hardtail version is available at the same price

LEFT-HANDERS: No

FINISHES: Pharaoh's Gold (as reviewed), Gloss Black, Electric Blue

Fender Musical Instruments EMEA

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9/10

PROS Combining bang-up-to-date performance with classic tones in a beautifully simple package – well played, Charvel

CONS A gigbag would be nice; no lefties