

FIRST PLAY



**FENDER VINTERA ROAD
WORN '70S TELECASTER
DELUXE**
£1,099

WHAT IS IT? Limited, aged nitro-finished repro of Fender's 70s-era twin-humbucker challenger to the classic Gibson style

One For The Road

The latest version of Fender's indie favourite comes as a limited-edition Road Worn model, and not only looks the part but packs a rather surprising punch

Words Neville Marten **Photography** Neil Godwin

We've said it many times before, but Fender's simple Telecaster platform of slab body, bolt-on neck and basic pickups, switching and controls makes it the perfect candidate for 'pimping'. Fender recognised this early on, with models such as 1959's bound-bodied Custom, the Paisley, Blue Flower and Thinline of '68, the Rosewood version from the following year, and many more.

Come the early 70s and a tougher rock movement had ushered in the new decade. This time Gibson ruled the roost and for a change Fender found itself on the back foot. So it chose the good ol' Tele to represent its vision of a thicker-toned and more powerful instrument. Enter the Custom and Deluxe, the former with single neck humbucker but retaining the Tele's bridge single coil, and its double-humbucker sibling the Deluxe (as reviewed). But while both were capable guitars in their own right, they failed to set the rock fraternity on fire. However, as has so often happened with models that missed bullseye at launch, the Deluxe and Custom would have their day. As with the Jaguar and Jazzmaster before them, these quirky Telecasters







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1. Note the vintage-style hardtail Strat bridge with steel saddles, and the four-way height-adjustable Wide Range humbuckers with their asymmetrical poles
2. Fender's three-bolt Micro-Tilt neck joint was never popular, but we've all played some really great guitars held together this way, and it does render neck shimming obsolete

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would much later find favour with indie and Brit-rock guitarists and, before that, Keith Richards.

With all this in mind, then, what better model to get the latest Road Worn treatment in Fender Mexico's Vintera range. Evoking the vibe of Fender's top-end Custom Shop Relics but at less than a third of the price, and despite their rather more piecemeal ageing, the Road Worns we've seen have been consistently impressive.

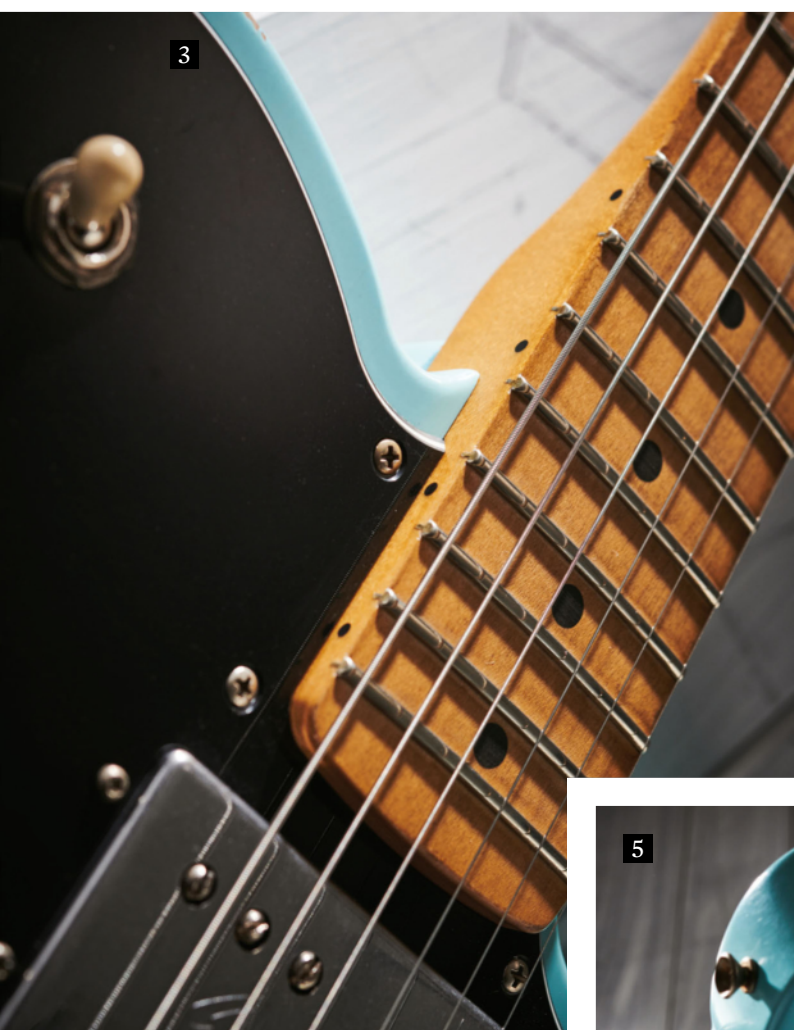
The construction is standard 70s Fender fare with its alder body and one-piece maple neck, held on by the three-bolt system prevalent in 1972 at the model's launch. While the finish is nitrocellulose on both body and neck (the originals were polyester), Fender has chosen to dull it down somewhat and leave the back of the neck almost bereft of finish. While we applaud the use of cellulose, we would have preferred to keep the finish gloss and the neck not so worn, but many guitarists will of course take the opposing view.

Obviously, the main thing that separated the Deluxe from previous Teles was its deployment of those humbucking pickups.

Given the name Wide Range, these were designed by Seth Lover who also invented Gibson's humbucker in 1956. It was something of a coup for the company, and to separate them visually from Seth's Gibson design they decided to split the polepieces with three adjustable and three hidden 'slug' coils either side, rather than in a single row. They were also tilt adjustable with screws at each corner. Gibson pickups are notoriously frustrating to adjust parallel with the strings; no such problem here.

Along with the change in pickups came a huge scratchplate covering much of the body, a large Strat-style headstock with protruding bullet truss-rod adjuster, a six-saddle string-through-body hardtail Strat bridge, and Les Paul-style toggle switch with a pair each of Gibson-style volume and tone controls. Round the back a big belly cut gave the new Tele almost Strat-level comfort (no forearm chamfer, though). This total mish-mash shouldn't have worked, but the final result was immensely pleasing.

The ageing on some of the earliest Road Worns looked a little industrial, but we've



also seen some that would rival Custom Shop Relics. The distressing here is pretty convincing save for the overly matted finish, with both the colours available (Daphne Blue as here, and Olympic White) handling the Deluxe treatment extremely well. As you'd expect with Fender Mexico, the fit of neck and hardware is exemplary (no 1mm neck joint gap here, as was often the case with the originals).

Feel & Sounds

What many people don't realise is that the 241mm (9.5-inch) radius and medium jumbo frets found on most Custom Shop Strats and Teles, and often thought to be a 'modern' phenomenon, appeared on the Deluxe nearly 50 years ago. As we know, it promotes improved string bending and vibrato, and it's come to be many players' favourite.

Fender has aped the original's medium C section neck, too, giving the guitar a palm-filling but nothing like bulky feel. It has to be said that the finish-free neck glides nicely under the hand, so all in all it's a fine and forgiving neck to play. At 3.56kg (7.85lb) it's about average for a modern Tele, and

certainly not the shoulder-crippling mass of many 70s and 80s Fenders.

Having not spent time with an original Deluxe for some years it was something of a shock to discover how superb this one sounds. Fender has subtly revoiced the pickups for a crisper, more modern sound, and with a Custom Shop Gibson ES-335 offering an admittedly ballpark comparison, the Mexican guitar matched it at every turn. Power wise, the guitars punched at exactly the same weight, each offering chiming cleans and dark brown (RIP Eddie) leads, the Tele perhaps more focused in the mids. Other than its playability, there was nothing to make

3. You can see from this close-up, the bigger frets and considerably flatter fingerboard that first appeared on the model almost 50 years ago

4. The large Strat-style headstock shows how the neck's light tint allows the nitro to almost glow in the light. And note the F-stamped parallelogram tuners that were current at the guitar's launch

5. Check out the matt finish on the Daphne Blue nitrocellulose, and the large Strat-style belly chamfer. You can also see the string-through-body ferrules that are, of course, standard Tele fare



Scuffed edges ape 50 years of playing wear. Note, too, the Gibson-like twin volumes and tones, plus the classic Telecaster jack socket

one believe it was a Telecaster. And in any situation, either live or recording, it would certainly pass muster as a Les Paul or SG stand-in.

And with that in mind the switching and control layout will be second nature to Gibson players, the three-way toggle sitting familiarly on the guitar's shoulder, with the four pots doing exactly what our ES-335 and all twin-humbucker Gibsons have done so well for decades. So, funky in-between tones, the 'both pickups on but with the neck turned down a tad' for the *Crossroads* sound, 'woman tone' and so many more are all at your fingertips. It's a fantastic-sounding guitar and these revoiced Wide Range pickups are a genuine triumph.

Verdict

Although the decades-old Deluxe has been a latter day success story, it's also something of a leftfield choice and this reviewer has never really played one much in anger. So picking this one up afresh was something of a revelation. Of course, dozens of Teles have been through these hands, with hundreds of gigs and sessions being played on one. But nothing has sounded quite like this.

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It's easy to think of the Telecaster Deluxe as an instrument for jangly riffs or unsubtle chord bashing, but that would be a very narrow-minded view. With the right amp and settings this guitar can of course be that thing, but good grief it can do so much more.

The Telecaster is such a brilliant design that it really does lend itself to almost any sensible modification. The Deluxe is the result of just such tweaks, and, it has to be said, is a resounding success. Whether you like or don't like the matt-finish treatment and all-but-bare neck, we'd guarantee you'll be bowled over by the guitar's superb sounds and impeccable behaviour.

And, weirdly, while Daphne Blue is perhaps our favourite Fender custom colour, it might just work better in Olympic White. It'll likely street for under a grand, too, so what are you waiting for? **G**



FENDER VINTERA ROAD WORN '70S TELECASTER DELUXE LIMITED EDITION

PRICE: £1,099 (inc gigbag)

ORIGIN: Mexico

TYPE: Single-cut solidbody electric

BODY: Alder

NECK: Maple, '72-style medium C profile, three screw w/ Micro-Tilt bolt-on

SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")

NUT/WIDTH: Synthetic bone, 42mm

FINGERBOARD: Maple, integral to one-piece neck, black dot inlays, 241mm (9.5") radius

FRETS: 21 medium jumbo

HARDWARE: Chrome-plated Strat-style hardtail bridge with through-body stringing, 'witch hat' knobs, Fender vintage-style 'F'-stamped tuners

STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 54mm

ELECTRICS: 2x revoiced Fender Wide Range humbuckers, 3-way toggle pickup selector, individual pickup volume and tone controls

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.56/7.85

OPTIONS: None

RANGE OPTIONS: Other Vintera Road Worns include the 50s Telecaster and the '50s and '60s Stratocaster – all £999

LEFT-HANDERS: Not at present

FINISHES: Daphne Blue (as reviewed), Olympic White – aged nitrocellulose

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PROS Fuss-free player; third of the price of a Custom Shop model; stunning range of tones

CONS Not sure about the dulled finish and bare wood back of the neck, but many players will love it