



# FLOWER POWER

PRS's Silver Sky broke the internet with its derivative style and big league artist attachment, so the new Fiore has a lot to live up to. Does it succeed? Oh, yes – and then some

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**PRS** FIORE £2,599

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## What You Need To Know

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### Mark Lettieri – who's he?

A hugely talented guitarist who many will know as a member of the Grammy Award-winning jazz/world group Snarky Puppy, whom he joined in 2008. On top of that, he's released numerous solo records, and formed the Fearless Flyers with Vulfpeck's Cory Wong in 2018. Head over to [www.marklettieri.com](http://www.marklettieri.com) to find out more.

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### What's behind the Fiore name?

Well, you've got to call a guitar something and 'fiore' is the Italian word for flower, coined by Mark's daughter. Continuing the family affair, his artist mother contributed the graphic design on the guitar's truss rod cover.

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### But it's just a Silver Sky with a bridge humbucker, right?

As we explore in this review, it does start with the familiar platform of the Silver Sky, but it proves to be quite a different ride. If the 'Sky' is a 60s-inspired 'vintage Strat', the Fiore jumps a couple of decades – it's a souped-up 'SuperStrat'!

**J**ohn Mayer's signature Silver Sky needs no introduction. However, bolt-on guitars go back to the very beginnings of PRS when the company was far from the household name it is today. While we detail that first attempt (the Classic Electric) later on in this feature, it's book-ended here by the new 2021 Fiore, co-designed with PRS's latest signature artist, Mark Lettieri.

If the Fiore comes across as a Silver Sky with a bridge humbucker (not a bad idea, actually), in reality it's quite its own thing. The two guitars do share that same bolt-on neck joint and full Fender scale length, but Mark's vision of an HSS 'SuperStrat' is very different to John's more vintage concept and, in many ways, actually seems more like a PRS, rather than – sorry! – a copy with the wrong headstock.

Here, for example, we get the *right* headstock: PRS's classic three-a-side design, which has graced pretty much every PRS guitar since 1985. The direct-mount pickups and rear-mounting controls are much more PRS, too, as are the side-placed output jack, not to mention the full-sized bird inlays, as opposed to the smaller outline inlays of the Silver Sky.

The body wood changes to swamp ash – *Fraxinus Americana*, known as white or American ash. It is, of course, synonymous

## THE RIVALS

If you're into your PRS guitars, the new 2021 Studio (£3,885) is the only other HSS in the line-up, although the 'single coils' are PRS's 'Narrowfield' side-by-side humbuckers.

Outside of the bubble, oh, there's Fender! The company offers the American Professional II Stratocaster HSS (£1,799) with its roasted pine body and two-point vibrato, the American Ultra Stratocaster HSS (£2,019), and the American Ultra Luxe Stratocaster Floyd Rose HSS (£2,399), another classic flavour of the 'SuperStrat' genre.

Suhr is obvious competition with the HSS Classic S (£2,499 from guitarguitar, with a special offer price on the lightly reliced Antique finish version of £2,599). Elsewhere, James Tyler's builds epitomise the hot-rod bolt-on style and the Japan-made Studio Elite (approx. £2,299) includes an active mid-boost and 'colour shifting' Shmear finish. Ibanez's well-received AZ models feature the HSS AZ2204 (approx. £2k), which has a roasted-maple neck on an alder body, Seymour Duncan Hyperion pickups and the smart Dyna-MIX 9 Switching.



1. Aside from a Floyd Rose, this is the first time PRS has used a two-post vibrato. The new Fiore humbucker is carefully voiced in order to balance with the single coils, especially in parallel mode

2. These latest Fiore single coils use large-diameter magnetic polepieces, flush with the cover to tie in with the flatter fingerboard radius

with early Fender, although currently it's classed as critically endangered thanks to the emerald ash borer beetle that has decimated many of the ash species in the USA. Fender has replaced it with roasted pine for the American Pro II range, but plenty of smaller-production, high-end makers still cherish this typically striped-grain lightweight wood.

Of the three colours offered on the Fiore, the wood's distinctive grain is only visible through the translucent red Amaryllis option: Black Iris and the bright-white Sugar Moon (seen here) are opaque colours. We can't help thinking a semi-translucent Fender-style blonde might have paid homage to this striking wood. Swamp ash is also known for its light weight, but at 3.96kg (8.71lb) it's considerably heavier than our reference Silver Sky by 0.65kg (nearly 1.5lb in old money).

Material and finish aside, the actual outline subtly redraws the Fender blueprint and is very slightly different from the Silver Sky, as we detail in our direct comparison between these two bolt-ons on page 82.

While the Silver Sky launched with a rosewood fingerboard (maple was added for 2020), the Fiore starts with maple. Like the headstock, the Fiore sticks to the standard PRS fingerboard radius of 254mm (10 inches) and uses standard PRS USA Core fretwire and large-topped bone saddle.

## Mark's vision of an HSS 'SuperStrat' is very different to John's more vintage concept

PRS redesigned the Fender-style vibrato on its original guitars then introduced a new, more vintage-Fender-inspired version for the Silver Sky. Mark states he's a two-post guy and one reason for the delay in the shipping of the guitar is that this design took longer to finalise. So we have those two pivot posts (4.96mm bolts that thread into collars mounted in the body, rather than screws), but the same pressed-steel saddles as the 'Sky, a steel block and top plate, plus a screw/push-in arm, here with a metal tip.

A constant area of change is in the pickups and circuit used by PRS, but typically the company is tight-lipped when it comes to specific details. While plenty of designers would have paired the well-received JM635 single coils of the Silver Sky with a bridge humbucker, for example – and PRS has plenty of those – these Fiore pickups are yet again tweaked and redesigned, as Mark explains on page 88.

The circuit is unique for any PRS we're aware of, too, using a pretty standard master volume and two tones (one for the two single coils, the other for the humbucker),





After the 'horror' of the Silver Sky's reversed three-a-side headstock, the Fiore returns to standard PRS-style but with its unique truss rod cover: the first with a graphic design on a PRS production guitar? We believe so

which both have pull switches. The middle tone control, tone 1, with the switch pulled up introduces a simple circuit known as the 'seven sound' or 'Gilmour' mod, which gives us the ability to voice the Tele-like bridge and neck (position 1 and 5), or all three together (in positions 2 and 4). The second tone switch introduces an option of conventional series linkage of the coils with the switch down or parallel with the switch up, which gives a cleaner, brighter but still hum-cancelling voicing.

### Feel & Sounds

Chunky and business-like sum up our first impressions, and using a 2016 CE24 as a base reference, the Fiore feels much less like a PRS and more a generic 'SuperStrat' – and plenty of those have passed through our hands over the past four decades. The Fiore's neck profile is very different from the CE's Pattern Thin profile, narrower in width at the nut, which measures 42.37mm, with fuller shoulders and more of a taper in terms of depth.

By the 12th fret we're feeling old Fender-like girth, not least with the well-rolled fingerboard edges, which slightly curve in. The untuned maple has a light finish that's smooth with none of that furry feel you can experience on a bare wood/oiled neck, while the standard PRS frets never feel

### The Fiore's expanded sounds are real-world additions that simply might save a gig or recording session

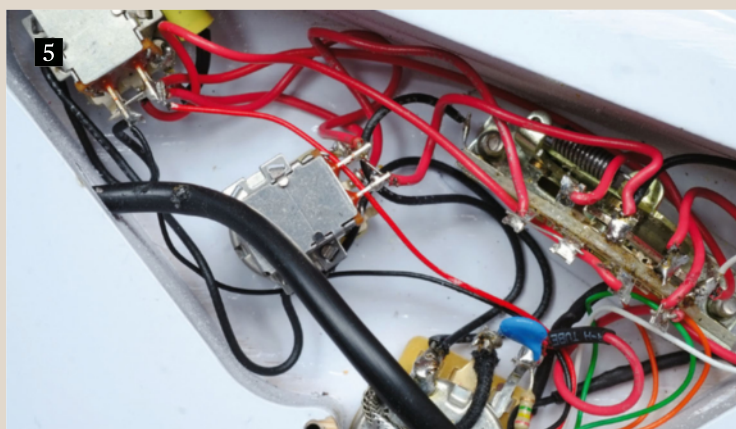
'jumbo', instead providing a near-perfect balance of width and enough height for easy bends. The round-nosed heel means there are no issues with top-fret access, either.

While the PRS Studio – another HSS model that's back in this year's line-up – reintroduced the tweaked Narrowfield mini-humbuckers with very much their own voice, a few licks on the neck pickup and you're on very familiar territory. We spend too long here: it's a beautiful example with depth and high-end detail and almost 3D complexity. If that's not addictive enough, the neck/middle mix certainly will be, and the extra sounds, the more direct neck and bridge, and all three together – which adds another slightly different shade of Fender-y bounce – just continue the subtle changes and shifts. We're sorry, but if only all Fenders we've played sounded like this. It's a marker of a really good guitar when it puts your own instruments into the shade.

The problem, or appeal, of any HSS configuration is what you want the bridge humbucker to do. Some like it to provide a hefty level boost; others just want a little more beef and smoothness over the standard bridge-placed single coil. It's the latter we have here and, despite the construction style, which might suggest a bright crisp voice, the Fiore 'bucker sounds smooth, thicker and with a slight (but not excessive) output lift compared with the middle or neck. It sounds less pushy than the 85/15 Treble on our CE 24. Comparing it with our Les Paul Classic's retrofitted Burstbucker 2 at the bridge, it's not a million miles away, although the Fiore's humbucker sounds like it's been post-EQ'd with subtly rounder highs and the almost brash upper midrange spike attenuated.

In parallel mode (the first time this simple trick has been used on a production PRS guitar), it provides a hum-cancelling thinner and brighter option that balances, output-wise, with the single coils beautifully. It almost feels that should be the standard sound and the bigger series voice should be introduced via a fast mini-switch.

As we begin to wind up the wick, this bridge humbucker impresses again: it gives us our 'Les Paul' in a creamy and quite thick dose but without the honk of a PAF-style or the mid-hump of an 'over-wound' high-



## UNDER THE HOOD

Is the Fiore as tidy on the inside as it is on the outside?

**T**his Fiore had already been on a couple of promotional visits to UK retailers, so the fact it needed a string change gives us a chance to take a closer look.

As you can see, all three pickups screw directly to the body and use a spring under each screw as a cushion that allows enough height adjustment. Those single coils don't have the flared base of the majority of aftermarket single coils, though – you won't be able to fit your favourite Bare Knuckles or Lollars here. You might have more luck with the humbucker, although you'll need to modify the legs because these are flush with the baseplate and they're rounded, too. Plus, if you're a real detail freak, you'll notice that the pickup spacing, at 49.3mm, is a little narrow for the wider spacing of this bridge.

On unscrewing the control backplate, we notice the wiring does look a little messy and certainly doesn't go down the vintage-y cloth-covered wire and boutique cap route. No, this is all standard stuff with two 500k pull-push tone pots (both of which measured under that nominal value) and a CTS volume control that, with the pickups unsoldered,

These Fiore pickups are yet again tweaked and redesigned... and the circuit is unique

measures bang-on 300kohms. We have the usual 180 picofarad treble bleed cap and the .033 microfarads tone cap that you'll find on plenty of PRSes, plus there's a small resistor wired in parallel between the input lug of the volume and ground. As it's valued at 2.4mega-ohms, it actually means the pickups 'see' a pot value of 268kohms, which helps tune the circuit to where Mark and PRS are happy.

3. These single coils don't have the flared base of a Strat-style pickup

4. The underside of the humbucker: note the unusual legs

5. The Fiore's wiring is far from 'boutique'

6. Close up, you can see the resistor on the volume control





Like so many parts on a modern PRS, these 'lampshade' knobs are a proprietary design. The two lower tone controls have a pull-switch that engages considerable versatility

output 'bucker. We suspect it might lack a little clarity on a darker-sounding guitar, but here it achieves a rare balance between girth, clarity and power.

If you come from the school of thought that believes humbuckers are just plain wrong on a Fender-style bolt-on, you probably haven't got this far. But for those of us whose tastes reside further from the purists' – and when it's done as well as this – the Fiore's hot-rod array feels like home. We just want to chuck it in the excellent included gigbag and head off to a gig.

### Verdict

Let's be honest, an HSS hot-rod bolt-on with a two-point non-locking vibrato and a couple of simple (and far from new) wiring mods is hardly groundbreaking stuff. We've been chopping up our Strats ever since we could get aftermarket pickups. It also means the Fiore faces considerable competition, and while Mark Lettieri is a highly respected player he's hardly in the John Mayer or Carlos Santana league in terms of profile. But dismiss this guitar at your peril. Mark's needs are little different from most working musicians and the

The Fiore's hot-rod array feels like home. We just want to chuck it in the gigbag and head to a gig

expanded sounds, not to mention the hum-cancelling neck/middle mix and the parallel 'single coil' humbucker option, are real-world additions that simply might save a gig or recording session.

For the PRS player, the Fiore comes across as a 'beater', a guitar to play out while those posher guitars stay safe at home, and could easily draw in other players who want to taste and feel the quality PRS proposition without the bling or price tag. Aside from the weight of our sample – which we'd wager is a one-off – it's a faultless piece. Combine that with the very well-voiced pickups, a great neck shape and PRS's tried-and-tested regular fingerboard radius and frets, and we're left with nothing to criticise. Apart from the fact that it's added yet another guitar to our wishlist! **G**



### PRS FIORE

**PRICE:** £2,599 (inc gigbag)

**ORIGIN:** USA

**TYPE:** Double-cutaway solidbody electric

**BODY:** Swamp ash

**NECK:** Maple, Fiore profile, bolt-on

**SCALE LENGTH:** 648mm (25.5")

**NUT/WIDTH:** Bone/42.37mm

**FINGERBOARD:** Maple, outline bird inlays, 254mm (10") radius

**FRETS:** 22, medium

**HARDWARE:** PRS-designed 2-post steel block vibrato, PRS-designed vintage-style locking tuners – nickel-plated

**STRING SPACING, BRIDGE:** 54mm

**ELECTRICS:** 2x PRS Fiore-S single coils (neck, middle), Fiore-H humbucker (bridge), 5-way lever pickup selector switch, master volume, tone 1 (neck & middle) w/ pull switch to add bridge/neck and all-three pickups to be voiced, tone 2 (bridge) w/ series/parallel pull switch

**WEIGHT (kg/lb):** 3.96/8.71

**OPTIONS:** None

**RANGE OPTIONS:** CE 24 (£2,269), CE 24 Semi-Hollow (2,425), Silver Sky (from £2,569) and DW CE 24 Floyd Ltd (£2,639)

**LEFT-HANDERS:** No

**FINISHES:** Amaryllis, Black Iris, Sugar Moon (as reviewed) – gloss NOC body; tinted nitro-cellulose neck



**PROS** Typically detailed, considered build; excellent single coils and matched humbucker voicing; handy 'extras' via the switched tone pots: a very good old-school 'SuperStrat'

**CONS** Limited colours, only one is translucent; no options; no lefties; our sample was overweight