



# Fender Vintera III Mid ‘60s Telecaster

Shifting the focus from the highlights of a decade to more specific years, Fender updates its Vintera range in a way that will please those who get a kick out of attention to vintage aesthetics

BY PETE EMERY

**SOME SAY THAT** we, as guitarists, spend too much time looking backwards, but to me, it makes sense that we spend a lot of our time investigating tones from decades gone by. Not that there isn't a place for modern innovations, of course, but a lot of what makes the electric guitar what it is originated throughout the '50s, '60s, and '70s. These tones are the basis of a lot of modern guitar sounds, so it makes sense that the gear from that era is still relevant.

And that is where the Fender Vintera series comes in. It is Fender's line of vintage speced, Mexican-made guitars that allows us access to the feel and sounds of a vintage instrument, without the price tag of something like the American Vintage II range, a Custom Shop guitar, or indeed a real vintage example.

With the Vintera series now in its third iteration, there's a notable focus from Fender; the current models are more specifically tied to certain years with period-correct details. I have the mid-'60s Telecaster in front of me for review, boasting, as you might expect, a spec reflective of that era with particular attention to the minutiae of the aesthetic.

Highlights that differ from its predecessor (the Vintera II '60s Telecaster) and show the specificity on offer here are a real bone nut, threaded steel saddles, a round laminated rosewood fingerboard, a decal over the finish, an 'F' logo on the neckplate, aged white pearloid dots, and a mid-'60s neck shape.

So, is this the sweet spot for vintage Fender fans away from the higher US model prices?

## Build quality

Despite being cheaper than its American-made cousins, the Vintera III Mid '60s Telecaster still retails at \$1,249, so we should absolutely demand a high-quality build. And for the most part, that's what we get.

It's the tried and tested combination of an alder body, maple neck, the aforementioned rosewood fretboard in the vintage correct round laminate iteration, and the vintage-style tuners that you would expect on an instrument of this ilk.

The tuners feel smooth to use, as do the knobs, although the volume knob (to be clear, I mean the metal knob, not the potentiometer) is sitting a little loose out of the box. Nothing that tightening the grub screw can't fix though.

Fender offers a choice of three colors - Firemist Gold, Vintage Blonde, and 3-Color Sunburst. It's the first of these I have here, and, being totally subjective, it is easily my favorite with its eye-catching gold shine.

The 21 vintage tall frets are finished well, with no obvious issues. Solid tuning is always a sign of a well-built guitar, and the Vintera III Mid '60s Telecaster performs well here, but my tuner got a little use as the guitar needed some attention while shooting a video in a warm room and at a slightly chilly outdoor gig. To be fair to Fender, a lot of guitars would wander a little in those circumstances.

Interestingly, we have vintage threaded steel saddles instead of the slotted steel found on the Vintera II. Being vintage-correct, these are not compensated, but the intonation is good enough that I don't find myself wanting for that. Let's face it, the nature of fretted instruments is that they are, in most cases, impossible to intonate perfectly anyway.

There are a couple of things that I would like to see improved - or at the very least hope other players don't encounter like I have. On this specific model, the lacquer on the side of the neck up by the higher frets is a little untidy, and the string tree sits atop a white plastic post, which slightly takes away from the premium aesthetic.

A quick note on truss rod adjustment - usually the neck needs to be removed to allow access to the adjuster, as is technically correct on a '60s spec'd Telecaster. This is a time-

## "I would prefer to see Fender tweak the pickups rather than the aesthetic"

consuming process, but some third-party brands - including StewMac and Hosco - produce different tools that allow a truss rod adjuster to be tweaked by only removing the scratchplate. It would be great for Fender to produce something similar and include it with vintage spec guitars like this.

## Playability

When it comes to playability, it's hard to find something to complain about. It's a vintage feel with a 7.25" fretboard radius, which won't suit the shredders among us, but it's a myth to suggest that this means a high action. All that is needed is a good setup, and this guitar proves it.

I measure the string heights at 1.5mm and 1.25mm on the low and high E, respectively, placing the action firmly in medium-low territory, with no fret buzz or string choking issues. For me, this is low enough for some flashy stuff, but high enough to allow some digging in.

This curved feel is generally accepted as being great for open chords, and this is reinforced by the 'mid-'60s C-shaped neck, which feels relatively skinny at the first fret and gets gradually thicker towards the 12th.

Although noticeably thicker than the modern C curve found on a lot of current Fenders, this sort of neck shape shares more with those than it does with the baseball bats of some '50s models. While this is entirely down to personal preference, I suspect many will find this to be the sweet spot between too thick and too thin.

The vintage tall frets make bending a breeze, and the guitar comes equipped with a gauge 9 set of strings, meaning there is plenty of scope for those David Gilmour impressions.

Again, you are not about to be doing three-note-per-string legato acrobatics here, but for the sort of playing this guitar is aimed at, and acknowledging some personal preference here, I'd say the guitar arrived perfectly set up out of the box.

## Sounds

Plugging in, and it's here where I feel the guitar could do with a bit of an upgrade. Installed are Fender's Vintage Style Mid '60s pickups, which are the same as featured on the Vintera II '60s Telecaster.

Starting with the positive, the high end is in a nice place to be. A Telecaster has been my main gigging instrument for a good number of years now, so I am quite used to the cutting treble that's a cornerstone of the Tele sound. Here, it is not quite as biting at my own '50s spec Custom Shop Fender pickups, but still quintessentially Tele, in a way that I can see a lot of players preferring.

Testing through a Vox AC30 paired with a Browne Amplification Ethane overdrive pedal, and a Dumble-esque sound on a Line 6 Helix Floor, this gives the neck pickup a nice chime on clean sounds, but keeps it clear at gainier settings.

On the bridge, it's the sort of high-end cut that will get you heard, although, as you would expect, it can be so cutting without careful tone control dialling, some will feel it best staying away from squeaky clean tones there.

It's the low end where I feel the pickups suffer. Gigging the Vintera III with both the aforementioned setups across two live gigs, riffs on the low E and A strings got lost in the mix because of the lack of low-end punch.

This is most problematic on the neck pickup in a clean context, although I find myself wanting for a little more beef in gainy, bridge pickup sounds too. If I am blunt about it, I would prefer to have seen Fender tweak the

## GUITAR WORLD VERDICT



**Boasting a vintage spec with an aesthetic specificity that will suit the purists at a reasonable price tag, this could be the perfect guitar for those hard-working, gigging guitarists after that vintage thing. You might want to upgrade the pickups, though.**

### PROS

- + Vintage spec but significantly cheaper than the American Vintage II.
- + Plays perfectly for the type of player this is aimed at.
- + Well set up out of the box.

### CONS

- Pickups sound a little thin.
- Lacquer is a little messy beside the higher frets.

### SPECS

**MADE:** Mexico  
**TYPE:** Six-string electric guitar  
**BODY:** Alder  
**NECK:** Maple, mid '60s C shape  
**FINGERBOARD:** Round laminated rosewood  
**SCALE LENGTH:** 25.5"/647.7mm  
**NUT/WIDTH:** 1.650"/42mm  
**FRETS:** 21, vintage tall  
**HARDWARE:** 3-Saddle Vintage Style Tele with Threaded Steel Saddles, Fender vintage style tuners  
**STRING SPACING AT BRIDGE:** 0.354"/9mm  
**ELECTRICS:** SS, three-position switch, Fender Mid '60s Tele pickups  
**WEIGHT:** 8.3lb/3.8kg  
**FINISHES:** Vintage Blond, 3-Color Sunburst, Firemist Gold (as reviewed)  
**OPTIONS:** Vintage Blonde with ash body and round laminated rosewood fretboard, 3-Color Sunburst with alder body and round laminated maple fretboard  
**LEFT-HANDED OPTIONS:** No  
**CASES:** Fender soft case

pickups for this new version, rather than the period correct changes elsewhere.

It's worth remembering, however, that the neck pickup remains mud-free, even with a decent helping of gain, and this lack of low end will be part of what contributes to that. So, while I don't think it is worth the compromise, there is an upside.

It's also worth considering that the pickups can be upgraded, with something like Fender's Pure Vintage '64 Telecaster pickup set. This would still bring in the guitar below the cost of its cheapest American-made brethren, and well below the vintage-spec'd American Vintage II range.

### Verdict

At around \$1,249, the Fender Vintera III Mid '60s Telecaster is not a budget guitar, but it is reasonably priced for a high-quality instrument. For reference, your closest option for a vintage spec Telecaster from Fender's current US-made range is the American Vintage II, coming in at \$2,449 at the time of writing.

The question is then, what do you lose for this significant cash saving? The answer, as this guitar proves, is not too much.

The main compromises are in a few aesthetic aspects of the build and the lack of beef in the pickups. Outside of that, it is a solid guitar that plays incredibly well, and having gigged it, would suit many a hard-working guitarist looking for that vintage thing. Upgrade those pickups, and what is already a very good guitar will become a stellar one.