



FENDER PLAYER II STRATOCASTER

£739

The Big F strikes back with a long-awaited sequel for one of its most popular ranges

It's been six years since the original Player Series guitars launched. The world was a different place back then, and guitars were a hell of a lot cheaper. As with everything else in life, the price of Fender's ever-popular made-in-Mexico guitars has risen significantly, which might leave guitarists wondering whether Player II is worth investing in as a successor.

The Player II Strat arrives as an evolutionary update to one of Fender's best-selling guitar series, nicking a feature from the Player Plus Series along the way. Returning to its roots we see a more vintage spec offering than that of the Player Plus, with a boatload of brand-new colours

unusual one, though, and without a clue what Hialeah is, we dubbed it 'the lemon cheesecake'. Sort of like Olympic White met your favourite dessert, we were initially unconvinced, but during our tests, it grew on us a lot. If traditional finishes are more your thing, you'll be spoiled for choice with a whopping 11 to choose from.

Getting started playing, Fender hasn't rocked the boat with regards to the neck profile. It's just as slinky as both the Player and Player Plus series guitars we've played, with the addition of those rolled fretboard edges to enhance the playability. It feels comfortable with pretty much any style, whether you're smashing out three-note-per-string legato licks

IT DELIVERS THOSE ICONIC STRATOCASTER TONES

that are much more traditional feeling, rolled fretboard edges, and the welcome return of slab Rosewood to certain colourways.

This Player II Strat sports a Hialeah Yellow finish on a contoured alder body, with a trio of Player Series Alnico 5 single-coil pickups. The neck and fretboard combo is maple with 22 medium jumbo frets, a 9.5" radius, and Fender's now-classic Modern 'C' profile on the reverse. Vintage-style ClassicGear tuners adorn the headstock whilst you've got a 2-point synchronised tremolo with bent steel saddles at the opposite end.

So far, so standard vintage-spec Strat. That finish is an

or strumming simple open chords. 22 frets add a touch of modernism, allowing you to bend up to a high 'E' a little more easily, and the overall feel is fantastic.

Plugging the guitar in, we're greeted with all the classic Strat tones you'd expect. Position 2 delivers superb surf sounds with the addition of some spring reverb, while moving to the neck positions allows you to nail those cleaner-than-thou staccato funk licks. Flicking back to the bridge position and cranking the gain gives you an aggressive tone that's great for punky powerchords, and although it doesn't quite hit chugging territory, you can certainly nail some heavy riffs.

1 FRETBOARD

The edges of the fretboard have been rolled to deliver a more played-in feel, resulting in a smooth feel for your fretting hand.

2 PICKUPS

A trio of Player Series Alnico 5 pickups delivers plenty of aggression for modern playing, as well as all of those iconic Stratocaster sounds.

3 TREMOLO

The rugged two-point tremolo lets you add some shine to your licks, giving you an extra tool for expressing solos and chords.

AT A GLANCE

BODY: Alder

NECK: Maple, modern C profile, bolt-on

FINGERBOARD: Maple, 25.5" scale, 9.5" radius

FRETS: 22, medium jumbo

PICKUPS: 3x Player Series Alnico 5 Strat Single-Coil

CONTROLS: Master volume, tone 1, tone 2, 5-way pickup selector

HARDWARE: 2-point synchronized tremolo with bent steel saddles, Fender ClassicGear tuning machines

FINISH: Hialeah Yellow (as reviewed), 3-Color Sunburst, White Blonde, Polar White, Transparent Cherry Burst, Coral Red, Birch Green, Black, Aquatone Blue, Aged Cherry Burst, Transparent Mocha Burst

CONTACT: Fender, fender.com





One in the chamber

The Player II Series' chambered bodies, explained

In a move that absolutely no one saw coming, the Player II Series will get a selection of chambered body options on certain Strat and Teles for the very first time. The ability to choose between chambered ash and chambered mahogany on certain colours is not only great for players who prefer a lighter instrument, but also offers a slightly different tonal quality from that of a regular solid-body guitar. Without getting too deep into the tonewood debate, the chambered ash bodies promise a more snappy tone, while chambered mahogany typically has a warmer timbre. Both should sound different from a regular solid body, with an extra resonance and openness that is an interesting (not to mention potential weight-saving) option to have at this price point.

There is one small issue however. The high E doesn't ring out properly when played open, which after some checking we deduced is a result of a badly cut nut. It's either a simple fix with a fret file or a nut replacement, but either way, a little disappointing to find it managed to slip past the factory quality control.

If you want a classic-sounding Strat, the Player II will tick all the boxes marked 'tone' and 'playability'. It may not be the very best value-for-money guitar out



there nowadays, but if you must have that Fender logo on your headstock, it's undoubtedly the cheapest way to do so, and it delivers those iconic Strat tones.

Matt McCracken

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

ALSO TRY...

SOLOKING MS-1 CUSTOM

£349

A hot-rodded super Strat with two powerful humbuckers and a roasted maple neck/fretboard combo. Perfect for those who want a little more heat in their guitar tones and playability.



SQUIER CLASSIC VIBE '60S STRATOCASTER

£379

For vintage Strat tones on a budget, this Squier Classic Vibe is a brilliant choice. The neck is incredibly playable and instantly familiar, a great option for the budget-conscious.



PRS SE NF3

£979

It looks like a Strat but delivers many tonal flavours, bridging the gap between classic single-coil and low-output humbuckers. Exceptional build quality and playability help it stand out.

