

FENDER 50TH ANNIVERSARY JAGUAR & JOHNNY MARR JAGUAR £1,942 EACH  
ELECTRICS



PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOBY SESSIONS





## Fender 50th Anniversary Jaguar & Johnny Marr Jaguar

**£1,942 each**

Two new Jaguars herald the half-century celebrations for Fender's least popular 'classic' electric. Has time and the input of one of the UK's most revered guitarists made it time to reconsider? *by Dave Burrluck*

**W**ith a perfectly good repro of the classic Jaguar already available in the form of the American Vintage '62 model, marking the 50th Anniversary of this idiosyncratic instrument wasn't going to be straightforward for Fender. So what we've ended up with are three new 'anniversary' guitars, designed to sum up the enduring appeal of the Jaguar. The first is Kurt Cobain's twin-humbucker Jag, released late last year, and here we have a slightly-modded official 50th Anniversary model and Johnny Marr's vastly reinterpreted guitar, based on six years of Jaguar obsession.

We detailed the story of Marr's journey to Jag love in our cover feature in issue 351, but this is the first time we've got our hands on the actual production guitar as well as the 50th Anniversary model.

### 50th Anniversary Jaguar

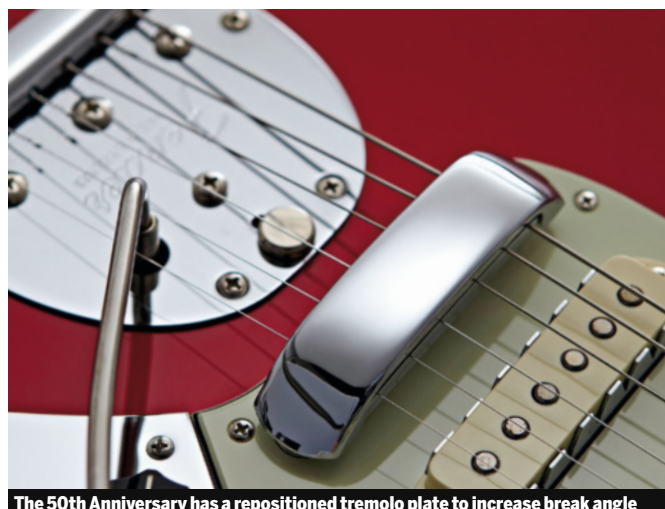
With a short scale length of 610mm (24 inches), a seemingly

over-complex dual rhythm/lead circuit control array and a vibrato that appears low-tech at best, the Jaguar is a strange cat.

The 50th Anniversary Jag isn't a direct replica of the original: the pickups, as on the

Classic Player Jaguar Special, have been given more output, the neck pitch slightly increased and the tailpiece assembly has been moved closer to the bridge by about 22mm (to, in theory, increase

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The 50th Anniversary has a repositioned tremolo plate to increase break angle

downward pressure on the bridge). Then there's the bigger medium jumbo frets on the modern, flatter Fender radius fingerboard – 241mm (9.5 inches) as opposed to 184mm (7.25 inches). Visually though, it's pretty much the same deal.

The neck not only feels short, it feels quite thin, enhanced by a shallow 'C'-section – 20.7mm at the first fret, 22.8mm at the 12th. It's a tidy job though: the binding and block inlay features hark back to 1965 and 1966 respectively, the original '62 being dot inlaid and unbound.

Aside from the different location of the vibrato tailpiece, and the omission of the flip-up string mute that still graces the American Vintage model, the vibrato and bridge are virtually identical to the original. So we get the six threaded-rod saddles, adjustable for height and intonation, which sit in the tray of the bridge. It rocks on the tips of two needle-point screws sitting in oversized body ferrules. The strings top-load at the back of the vibrato assembly. Forward of that is a tension-adjustment screw for the large hidden spring and in front of that is the trem-lock. When adjusted correctly, this can be moved backwards to stop the vibrato's up-bend, but not down-bend, without changing the overall pitch. The long arm simply push-fits into the protruding collar giving a slightly sloppy yet flexible feel, more Bigsby-like than the Stratocaster's more precise vibrato.

The Jaguar's pickups (with their distinctive 'saw blade' partial shields that help focus the magnetic field) direct-mount to the body, but are height adjustable. Fender has upped the output considerably.

Using a DC ohm meter reading to measure the pickup output you can see the change: they're nearly double those of the American Vintage's pickups, or indeed the Johnny Marr.

The rhythm circuit, engaged with the uppermost slide switch on the bass-side chromed control panel pulled up, voices just the neck pickup with its own volume and tone roller controls. Pushing that slide switch downwards engages the lead circuit, controlled by the conventionally placed volume and tone controls on the lower chromed control plate. The third chromed plate houses three slide switches. The top switch (pulled up) voices the neck pickup, down is off; it's the same deal for the middle switch which controls the bridge pickup. The lower switch is a high-pass filter – down is off; when up, we lose some mids and lows for a brighter tonality.

### Johnny Marr Jaguar

Rarely have we come across a redesign of a classic instrument that is so thorough... yet still adheres so closely to the original! Neck shape, body contouring, hardware, pickups

and electronics have all been under the microscope of Marr and his design cohorts: UK repairman Bill Puplett, engineer John Moore and Tim Mills of Bare Knuckle Pickups. The body contouring is subtly different: the ribcage contour is longer but not quite as deep as the American Vintage or 50th Anniversary Jaguars; the forearm contour is slightly more rounded, and less angular than the other models.

If that's pretty marginal to the playing experience, the neck shape – inspired by Marr's favourite '65 model – is much more profound. In the hand it feels similar in the lower-fret positions but fuller as you move up the neck – 21mm at the first fret, 24.85mm at the 12th. It also retains the original-style smaller vintage frets and the more curved fingerboard radius (like the American Vintage) making it feel even fuller than the dimensions suggest. These subtle changes have a huge effect: the neck feels more 'grown-up'.

The new bridge design swaps the threaded rod saddles of the Jaguar for the bigger, solid, non-height adjustable Mustang saddles that sit flush on the

bridge tray. The string spread of 56.5mm is wider than either the 50th Anniversary – which is closer to 54.5mm and, of course, you can alter this by moving the outer strings inwards and resting them in another adjacent thread. The Mustang saddles just have a centre-placed string groove but this increased width means there's very little gap between the low E and the outer edge of the fingerboard the further up the neck you go. The bridge pivots in the same fashion, but nylon 'locks' prevent those needle-point screws from moving under tension – thus avoiding the decrease in string height that Marr had noticed and was confirmed by Puplett. Another of Moore's engineering ideas was adding a nylon insert to the vibrato arm collar: the arm still push-fits but it feels smoother, more precise and more importantly absorbs any free play.

Marr has also ditched the dual rhythm/lead concept.

This Jag has just one circuit: standard volume and tone controls and a four-position lever switch mounted on the smaller of the three chromed plates. In position one, it offers just the bridge pickup; position two, bridge and neck pickups (in parallel); position three, neck pickup; and lastly position four, neck and bridge pickups (in series). We still have the slide-switch style of the original Jaguar to engage not one, but two, of the original's high-pass filters. The top switch is the master filter (up engages the cut); the lower switch, mounted at a right angle, only works on position four where forward is on (ie it introduces the cut). Both these switches stick up less than the standard slide switches too, and are slightly more comfortable: typical of the thought and detail that has gone into this guitar.

### Sounds

To get into Jaguar world we started our test with a new

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The rhythm circuit operates independently of the other controls. Muffled, you say?





American Vintage '62. Initially it seems weedy, bright and a little bass-light. But dialling in a clean Fender valve amp tone with reverb, generous bass and some mid-range scoop, we're transported back to the sixties, surf 'n' all. The high-end attack from the bridge pickup will get you heard in the densest of mixes, the twin pickup mix is more three-dimensional with added weight and a really percussive, almost metallic

attack. The neck pickup, which sort of sounds like a Strat's middle pickup, retains plenty of high-end with a more fundamental depth – it's certainly bright enough as a 'lead' pickup for many of us. Switch to the rhythm circuit and even with both roller controls full up it's like you've engaged a 'muffle' switch.

The 50th takes us on a different route. Those more delicate, highly retro and evocative sounds are replaced with a hotter tonality with quite an upper-mid push that clouds the 'Fender-ness' a little. This pup is begging for gain so we don't stay too long in the

sixties. And that's the strange thing: upping the amp gain and adding some front end boost, the Jag takes on its more modern voice. Edgy distortion, wiry leads... it's nastier, punkier, way more CBGBs.

If the American Vintage takes us very nicely back in time, and the 50th Anniversary to a more contemporary place, then the Marr Jag just wants to make music and write songs. The combination of all the tweaks, especially that neck, gives a superbly functional platform – yes, you still have to think about those slide switches – but that aside the four-way switch is just so useable. The bridge pickup

sound combines brights with a certain sweetness that's far from ear-wearing; there's a hint of out-of-phase to the combined position, which in a good way adds character, a little Tele-like with it. The neck pickup again goes for musical sweetness and the darker humbucking linkage of the combined coils is mellow, fruity and surprisingly big sounding. Add in some modulation, delay and reverbs and you can create some huge soundscapes and, with some funky distortion added from front-end boost, tougher, classic Jag wiriness is no problem either. There's Fender-aplenty in the sounds but, as Marr says,

## The Rivals

**Fano's Alt de Facto JM6** (£1,999) is one of Dennis Fano's finest creations. It's based on a Jazzmaster, of course, but that's the same shape as a Jaguar, and it's aged to within an inch of its life. Plus there are trillions of options. Much more affordable, also designed by a legendary guitar player and also featuring tricky switching and a vibrato is the **Brian May Special** (£599). It sports three Burns Tri-Sonic pickups and individual pickup in/out phase switches, plus Individual pickup on/off switches for tonal options aplenty. If the Fender Jaguar, back in 1962, seemed like a 'super guitar', the same could be said today of the **James Tyler Variax**. It's loaded with vintage-modelled sounds (though not a Jaguar among them) and in its vibrato-equipped **JTV-69** format is a powerful tool – expect to pay around £1,100 for the Korean-made version and £2,500 for the USA model. Both models have the same onboard electronics.



The Johnny Marr model's new bridge assembly uses Mustang saddles and nylon 'locks' for screw stability



The Johnny Marr model has a new four-position selector switch design

Of all the modern Jaguars we've had to test, the Marr is quite simply the most functional and musical

Grestch and Rickenbacker spring to mind, especially with a little tone roll-off. Above all though, the clarity, and the musical sweetness of the tones allow for complex chord voicings for jazzier rhythms or simpler soul and funk styles.

Of the three modern Jaguars we had for our listening test, the Marr, while clearly still a Jaguar, is for us quite simply the most functional and most musical sounding.

## Verdict

This is simple. The 50th Anniversary Jaguar is a nice piece, but does it really bring anything new to the table? It's pretty much just a USA-made version of the cheaper Mexican-made Classic Player Jaguar Special. The Johnny Marr Jaguar, however, is a thorough redesign from the perspective of a very busy working guitarist. Aside from the low E being rather too close to the fingerboard edge in higher positions, it's faultlessly built for purpose, addresses five decades of 'Jaguar-ness' and puts a decidedly leftfield design squarely back in the mainstream. Yup, it's not cheap, but bearing in mind the USA build, lengthy R&D time, mechanical improvements and the simply superb-sounding Bare Knuckle pickups, it's

hardly unreasonable. If you're drawn to the looks and distinctive voice of the Jaguar but have never got on with its 'faults', here's the guitar you've been waiting for. **G**

## The Bottom Line

### Fender 50th Anniversary Jaguar

**We like:** Classy, nicely made anniversary model

**We dislike:** It lacks those classic sixties tones in favour of more gain-ready tones

**Guitarist says:** A perfectly good Jaguar. But does it really broaden the appeal of what was a truly oddball Leo Fender design?

### Fender Johnny Marr Jaguar

**We like:** The most practical and best-sounding Jag we've ever played

**We dislike:** The low E sits too close to the fingerboard edge; not everyone will like the vintage frets

**Guitarist says:** Finally, 50 years on, the evocative style and sound of the Jaguar is now available on an instrument that works. Nice one, Mr Marr



## Fender 50th Anniversary Jaguar

**PRICE:** £1,942.80 (inc case)

**ORIGIN:** USA

**TYPE:** Offset double-cutaway solidbody electric

**BODY:** Alder

**NECK:** Maple, 'C'-shaped, bolt-on

**SCALE LENGTH:** 610mm (24 inches)

**NUT/WIDTH:** Synthetic bone/42.4mm

**FINGERBOARD:** Edge-bound rosewood, pearloid block inlays, 241mm (9.5-inch) radius

**FRETS:** 22, medium jumbo

**HARDWARE:** Fender Vintage Style Floating Tremolo with Tremolo Lock Button (and cover), split-post tuners – all chrome plated

**STRING SPACING, BRIDGE:** 54.5mm

**ELECTRICS:** Two Fender Special Design Hot Jaguar single-coil pickups. Lead circuit: volume, tone, two on/off slide switches, one for each pickup, two-position tone switch (high-pass filter). Rhythm circuit: volume, tone. Rhythm/lead circuit slide switch

**WEIGHT (kg/lb):** 4/8.75

**OPTIONS:** None

**RANGE OPTIONS:** See 'The Jag Pack' on following pages

**LEFT-HANDERS:** No

**FINISHES:** Lake Placid Blue, Candy Apple Red, Burgundy Mist Metallic – nitrocellulose neck and body

**Fender GBI**

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## Test results

Build quality	★★★★★
Playability	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★

**GUITARIST RATING** ★★★★★



## Fender Johnny Marr Jaguar

**PRICE:** £1,942.80 (inc case)

**ORIGIN:** USA

**TYPE:** Offset double-cutaway solidbody electric

**BODY:** Alder

**NECK:** Maple, custom shape (based on JM's '65 Jaguar), bolt-on

**SCALE LENGTH:** 610mm (24 inches)

**NUT/WIDTH:** Synthetic bone/42.5mm

**FINGERBOARD:** Rosewood, 'clay' dot inlays, 184mm (7.25-inch) radius

**FRETS:** 22, vintage-style

**HARDWARE:** Fender Jaguar bridge with Mustang saddles and vintage style 'floating' tremolo tailpiece, split-post tuners – all chrome plated

**STRING SPACING, BRIDGE:** 56.5mm

**ELECTRICS:** Two custom-wound Bare Knuckle Johnny Marr single-coil pickups, four-position lever pickup selector switch, two slide-switches: universal bright switch; bright switch for blade position four; master volume, master tone

**WEIGHT (kg/lb):** 4/8.75

**OPTIONS:** None

**RANGE OPTIONS:** See 'The Jag Pack'

**LEFT-HANDERS:** No

**FINISHES:** Olympic White, Metallic KO – nitrocellulose neck and body



## Test results

Build quality	★★★★★
Playability	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★

**GUITARIST RATING** ★★★★★





# The Jag Pack

Not satisfied by our reviewed Jaguars? Fender has plenty more...



**American Vintage '62 Jaguar from** £1,942

The closest to an original Jaguar, the American Vintage '62 was used as a reference for our review of the 50th Anniversary and Johnny Marr Jaguars. It's a real time-warp complete with original string mute and bridge cover and available in sunburst, black and white.



**Classic Player Jaguar Special from** £958

Another tweaked Jaguar, this Classic Player features hotter Special Design Hot Jaguar single-coils, with subtly increased neck back angle, flatter 9.5-inch fingerboard radius with medium jumbo frets and relocated vibrato closer to the Adjusto-Matic bridge.



**Kurt Cobain Jaguar** £1,342

A Road Worn aged finish replica of the 1965 modded Jag used by the late Nirvana frontman. It sports a Strat-headstock, bound neck but with dot inlays, a 9.5-inch radius and medium-jumbo frets, two DiMarzio humbuckers, a three-way toggle pickup selector, an Adjusto-Matic bridge and third (additional volume) control.



**Special Edition Jaguar Thinline** £1,510

This is a funky one with semi-hollow ash over alder body, vintage rosewood board and vintage-style frets and dual vintage-style Jaguar single-coils and original-style wiring. The Special Edition Jaguar HH (£N/A) is a solid alder-bodied version with dual MIJ Dragster humbuckers.



**Blacktop Jaguar HH** £622

Another take on the dual-humbucker (Hot Vintage Alnico) and hardtail formula although this time we get a flatter 9.5-inch fingerboard radius, medium jumbo frets, simplified controls – three-way toggle pickup selector, master volume and tone – and black skirted control knobs.



**Modern Player Jaguar** £454

Designed to be "my first Fender", the Modern Player Jag is stripped down so much it's only a Jaguar in body outline. Hardtail, two soapbar single-coils, three-way toggle pickup selector and – most shockingly – a Strat-style dished output jack socket.