



# FENDER AMERICAN PRO II STRATOCASTER HSS

The do-it-all Strat?

£1649

**H**ow does a company evolve a design that they got so right at the start? With the Strat, Fender treads carefully but with its recent Ultra series, it proved that its carefully considered tweaks can amount to quite a lot. But it has to be a sensitive balance, retaining the very things that make the Strat experience so attractive. So where does that leave us with Fender's new standard; the second iteration of the Professional II.

There's no doubt some of the Ultra's features have influenced the changes here, but the Pro II also brings its own distinct changes; namely a new tonewood option with roasted pine (the roasting improves its resonance). While the Sienna Sunburst finish also uses this new sustainable

with push-arm and Narrow Tall fretwire. The Pro II adds in contoured neck heel and plate for easier access (thought it's not as dramatic as the Ultra's), but the added electric options across the line are the boldest upgrade.

For the HSS Strat, it's a Double Tap (see boxout) humbucker that promises to make an already versatile take on the Strat blueprint even further. The neck's deeper C-shape is certainly subtle, and this is a really comfortable Strat-playing experience enhanced by the rear satin finish. The neck contour does make a notable difference to accessing those highest frets more easily.

The two-point tremolo is wonderfully responsive acoustically, and because tuning remains stable it becomes

addictive. But before we plug in, there are a couple of issues to address. The G string is buzzing on all frets – thankfully it's not a nut issue and a string change addresses it. We also choose to raise the pickups as they seem a little low to us. It's a personal preference but we really like that Fender provide two adjustment screws for the single-coil and humbucker parts of the Double Tap – for good reasons.

Some people just can't accept the idea of a humbucker on a Strat but Fender have integrated it here as only experts do – from the zebra bobbin to blend it into the control plate aesthetically to the Double Tap's role in the broader spectrum, it all makes sense. This isn't

## 1 FINISH

The roasting process darkens the pine, but other than that there's just a clear coat after the sanding is sealed on this natural finish.

## 2 BRIDGE

The two-post bridge now boasts a chamfered cold-rolled steel vibrato block that, says Fender, "increases sustain, clarity and high-end sparkle".

## 3 DOUBLE TAP HUMBUCKER

Fender's patented Double Tap was introduced on its Performer series and aims to minimise the volume loss between humbucker and single-coil sounds.

## AT A GLANCE

**BODY** Roasted pine

**NECK** Maple, modern 'deep C' profile, bolt-on

**SCALE** 25.5" (648mm)

**FINGERBOARD** Maple / 9.5" radius

**FRETS** 22, narrow tall

**PICKUPS** Fender V-Mod II Double Tap humbucker (bridge), V-Mod II single coil Strat (middle & neck)

**CONTROLS** Five-position lever pickup selector switch, master volume (w/ treble bleed), tone 1 (neck & middle), tone 2 (bridge) w/push-push switch coil-split

**HARDWARE** Nickel/chromed-plated 2-point synchronised vibrato with bent steel saddles and pop-in arm and coldrolled steel block, Fender Standard cast/sealed staggered tuners

**FINISH** Roasted Pine, Sienna Sunburst, 3-Color Sunburst, Olympic White, Mystic Surf Mercury, Miami Blue, Dark Night

**CONTACT** Fender, [www.fender.com](http://www.fender.com)



## “A REAL PRIZE WORKHORSE FOR IT'S ASKING PRICE”

replacement for ash, here in clear-coated natural glory.

The pine looks more 70s retro than some of the bold new finishes in the Professional II line, and it will probably be one of the most divisive. But in the first reveal of the new line that TG attended, it was suggested these pine models would be on the lighter side of Strat weights, and at 7.5lbs ours is certainly on the lower side.

When it replaced the American Standard series in 2017, the American Professional sought to continue its appeal to a wide range of players but ring in some changes; a slightly deeper take on the Modern C-shape neck, two-point synchronised tremolo





## Hum's the word

Why the Pro II's pickups offer a distinct proposition

The pickups here are the result of some carefully considered R&D. Fender's Double Tap humbucker is not a traditional coil-split affair and features some unique wiring plus mismatched coils to reduce the difference in output when switching between single-coil and humbucker modes with the push-push tone control. The other two V-Mod II pickups are an enhanced version of Tim Shaw's original Pro design using mixed magnets to create hum-cancelling single-coils; the neck uses Alnico II on the bass-side magnets and III for the treble while the middle again uses Alnico II for the bass with V for the treble.

some hot rod 'bucker – it's an extra voice to transition to. So it's not ideal for death metal, but is articulate and doesn't jar when transitioning too and from the positions. In offering two extra voices (bridge and position 2), it brings the total to seven.

That makes for a serious array of tones when combined with the two volumes' incredibly effective treble bleed circuits that encourage you to explore the extremes of their taper in combination with the tone pot. You can effectively set the controls here to activate tone presets without touching a pedal.



The Strat spank and sparkle is all here, and the more we play, the more we discover. We can't resist some heavier riffs and rhythm through a Victory Countess with an EHX Soul Food pedal and this guitar just keeps revealing more versatility with every test. The neck pickup handles higher gain very well – articulate and percussive.

So yes, this is as close to a stock do-it-all Strat we've played, and yes, you do get a real prize workhorse for your asking price. The pine finish will turn some people off, but other options are

available and, along with the standard version, it's the most user-friendly and seamless switching we've played in a Strat. It's another great example of a timeless design that's found another way to successfully evolve here.

**Rob Laing**

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

## ALSO TRY...

### FENDER ULTRA STRATOCASTER HSS

£1919

Rosewood fingerboard only for this higher-priced sibling, but five exclusive finishes with a Double Tap, noiseless single-coils, locking tuners and 10"-14" compound-radius fingerboard.



### AMERICAN PERFORMER STRAT HSS

£999

If you can't stump for the Pro II or Ultra, this is a great way to enjoy the original Double Tap equipped Strat. Its Yosemite single coils are some of the best examples we've heard.



### CORT G290 FAT

£549

An affordable but versatile s-type from 2019, with coil-splits as part of its five positions, recessed trem and a roasted maple neck.

