



## GB INFO

## FENDER CLASSIC PLAYER TELECASTERS

**BUILT IN:** Mexico  
**SCALE LENGTH:** 648mm (25.5 inches)  
**NUT WIDTH:** 42mm (1.65 inches)  
**STRING SPACING AT NUT:** 35mm (1.38 inches)  
**STRING SPACING AT BRIDGE:** 52mm (2 inches)  
**NECK:** Maple, one piece  
**FRETS:** 21 medium jumbo  
**CONTROLS:** 2 x volume, 2 x tone, 3-way selector  
**MACHINEHEADS:** Fender/Schaller Vintage 'F' Style  
**CASE:** Fender Deluxe gigbag included  
**LEFT-HANDERS:** No

## CLASSIC PLAYER TELECASTER THINLINE DELUXE

**PRICE:** £809.99 as reviewed

**BODY:** Ash, semi-hollow  
**FINGERBOARD:** Maple, 241mm radius (9.5 inches)  
**PICKUPS:** 2 x Fender 'Wide Range' humbuckers  
**BRIDGE:** Vintage-style Strat 'hardtail' bridge  
**WEIGHT:** 3.2kg (7lb)  
**FINISHES:** 2-colour sunburst (shown), black (£779.99); gloss polyester

## CLASSIC PLAYER TELECASTER DELUXE WITH TREMOLO

**PRICE:** £779.99 as reviewed

**BODY:** Alder  
**FINGERBOARD:** Maple, 305mm radius (12 inches)  
**PICKUPS:** 2 x Fender 'Wide Range' humbuckers  
**BRIDGE:** Vintage-style Synchronized Tremolo  
**WEIGHT:** 3.6kg (8lb)  
**FINISHES:** 2-colour sunburst (£809.99), black (shown); gloss polyester

## CLASSIC PLAYER TELECASTER DELUXE BLACK DOVE

**PRICE:** £779.99 as reviewed

**BODY:** Alder  
**FINGERBOARD:** Maple, 305mm radius (12 inches)  
**PICKUPS:** 2 x Black Dove single-coils  
**BRIDGE:** Vintage-style Strat 'hardtail' bridge  
**WEIGHT:** 3.6kg (8lb)  
**FINISHES:** Black (shown), crimson red transparent; gloss polyester

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# MODERN CLASSICS

WITH THREE NEW CLASSIC PLAYER TELE DELUXE MODELS THAT MIX MODERN PLAYABILITY WITH DISTINCTLY RETRO DESIGN, **TIM SLATER** GETS WELL AND TRULY HOOKED ON THE CLASSICS...

As the world's biggest musical instrument company and one of, if not the most recognisable guitar brand around, Fender is in the enviable position of being able to rewrite its own history. The US behemoth has the power to tinker, tweak, reinvent and reinvent models from its past seemingly at will, including some that perhaps didn't quite get players frothing with excitement first time around.

If anyone has a right to monkey around with these designs, it's Fender, and the popular Classic Player series is entirely devoted to producing retro-style guitars that have been tweaked to deliver performance that is much more in line with a modern Fender. With that in mind, none of the three Classic Player Telecasters reviewed here is intended as a 100 percent accurate reissue. However, two of them – the semi-hollow Thinline Deluxe and the Deluxe with Tremolo – both suggest early 1970s throwbacks, while the P-90-equipped Deluxe Black Dove offers fans of single-coil pickups a chance to join the party too.

## BODIES & NECKS

The semi-hollow Thinline Deluxe is partly modelled after the 'Type II'

Telecaster Thinline. Appearing around late 1971, this marked the period when the Thinline model switched from regular Tele-style single-coils to Fender's 'Wide Range' humbucking pickups. Like the original Type II Thinline, this new Classic Player model features an ash body that is partially hollowed out from the rear, leaving sizeable acoustic chambers either side of a solid centre.

Sharp-eyed readers may have noticed that the Classic Player Thinline Deluxe's control layout deviates from the typical Thinline design courtesy of its Gibson-style quartet of rotary knobs and a three-position pickup toggle switch in place of the usual compact Tele control array (volume, tone and a three-way blade selector).

In some senses, then, the Classic Player Thinline Deluxe is something of a hybrid of an early 1970s Telecaster Deluxe, a Tele Custom and the Type II Thinline. Out of all three guitars featured in this review, we'd argue that the Thinline Deluxe has the most immediate visual appeal – though perhaps the handsome sunburst finish has something to do with it. The sunburst, also an option on the Deluxe with Tremolo though not the Black Dove, adds a refreshingly modest £30 to the retail price. ➔

WIDE RANGE CHANGES

PICKUP GURU CURTIS NOVAK ON THE ORIGINAL 'WIDE RANGE' HUMBUCKER...



IMAGE: WWW.CURTISNOVAK.COM

**■ The Thinline and Deluxe Tremolo models are both equipped with a pair of reissue 'Wide Range' humbuckers.**

These pickups were originally designed in the early 1970s by Seth Lover, the man who invented the original humbucking pickup for Gibson and defected to arch rivals Fender at the end of the 1960s. The Wide Range pickups were among the most powerful of their type when they first appeared, yet they retained the clarity and detail that most associate with the classic Fender tone. However, the reissues found on these guitars are rather different in design. Pickup expert Curtis Novak ([www.curtisnovak.com](http://www.curtisnovak.com)) is on hand to explain:

"The pickup on the left of the picture above is a reissue, while the original Wide Range humbucker is on the right. If you look closely where the bobbins rest on the metal baseplate, you will notice that the reissue pickup's bobbins are sitting on a bar magnet, while the original Wide Range sits directly on the metal pickup base. The reason for this is that the original pickup used a threaded rod magnet made from 'CuNiFe'.

"This is an alloy of copper (Cu), nickel (Ni) and iron (Fe), as opposed to the more familiar 'AlNiCo', an alloy of aluminium (Al), nickel (Ni) and cobalt (Co). This magnet difference – and the coils being wound a little hotter – are the only real things that make this pickup different from a Gibson humbucker.

"This might seem to be a subtle difference, but it completely alters the tone of the pickup. A rod magnet

pointed directly at the string has a completely different magnetic field and resulting tone to that of a bar magnet laying horizontal to the strings under the bobbins, magnetising steel screws. This distinction is at the core of the difference between the archetypal Fender and Gibson pickup tones.

"So why would Fender reissue a pickup that originally used rod magnets, but make it like a Gibson humbucker by using a bar magnet and steel screws? The only answer I can come up with is the Cunife magnets are very, very hard to source worldwide, which translates to being very expensive. There is much mystery and even more misinformation regarding the properties of Cunife alloy, but in reality it is sonically much like Alnico. The special property of Cunife that required its use over the standard Alnico was that Cunife could be machined into a screw, where the Alnico would crumble if machined.

"Over the past six years now I have reworked hundreds of these reissue pickups back to vintage specs with much success. In the beginning, I simply removed the potting, rewound them to the proper resistance and replaced the bar magnets and steel screws with pressed-in rod magnets with a faux screw head. However, about half a year ago I successfully sourced a good threaded screw magnet. This simple modification makes a world of difference in tone, and successfully takes the reissue back to sounding like the original vintage Wide Range humbucker."

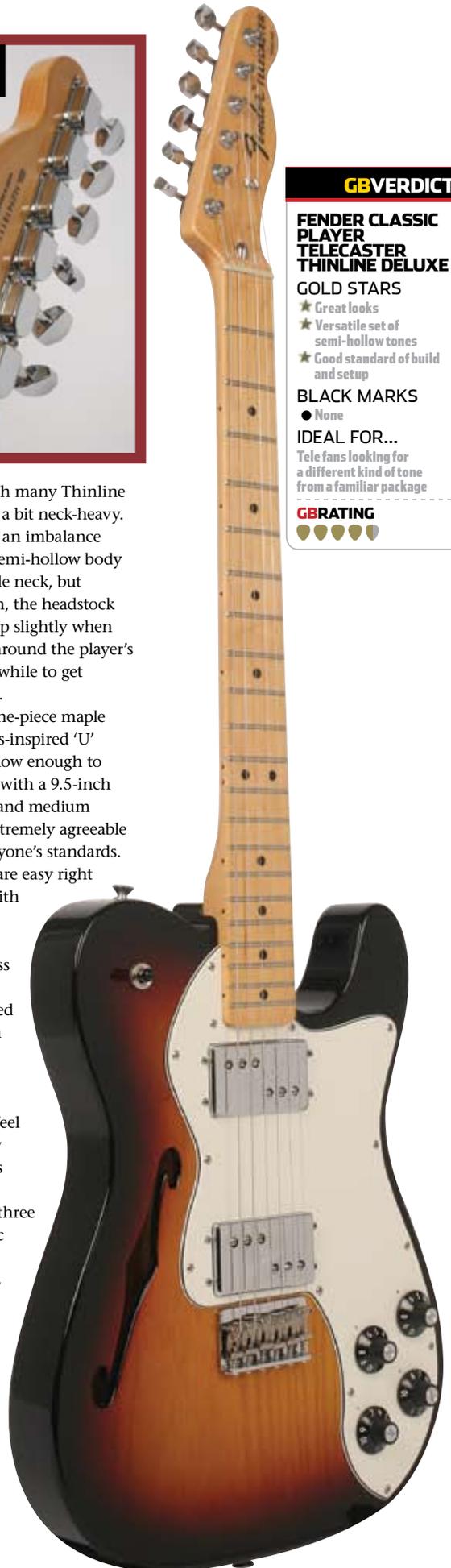


■ A set of F-stamped Schaller-style tuners is fitted to each guitar

As is the case with many Thinline Teles, this one feels a bit neck-heavy. This may be due to an imbalance between the light semi-hollow body and the dense maple neck, but whatever the reason, the headstock seems to want to dip slightly when the guitar is slung around the player's neck and it takes a while to get comfortable with it.

The Thinline's one-piece maple neck is a comfy '70s-inspired 'U' shape, though shallow enough to suit modern tastes, with a 9.5-inch fingerboard radius and medium jumbo frets – an extremely agreeable combination by anyone's standards. Wide string bends are easy right across the board, with no fretting-out or choking, and while the neck's high-gloss finish perhaps feels a bit sticky compared to the smooth satin finish found on Fender's American Standard series, its super-comfortable feel quickly negates any doubts regarding its practicality.

The fact that all three of these new Classic Player Teles have 21-fret fingerboards might be seen as a limitation by those more accustomed to a modern 22- or 24-fret neck, but whenever this subject arises, just remember that 21 frets



GBVERDICT

**FENDER CLASSIC PLAYER TELECASTER THINLINE DELUXE**

**GOLD STARS**

- ★ Great looks
- ★ Versatile set of semi-hollow tones
- ★ Good standard of build and setup

**BLACK MARKS**

- None

**IDEAL FOR...**

Tele fans looking for a different kind of tone from a familiar package

GBRATING





■ All three guitars feature Fender amp-style skirted knobs, with volume and tone for each pickup

were OK as far as Jimi, Yngwie and Ritchie Blackmore were concerned. If it's good enough for them, it's certainly good enough for you...

The Deluxe with Tremolo and the Deluxe Black Dove both feature solid alder bodies with Strat-style ribcage contours at the rear, which, it could be argued, make a welcome change to the standard Telecaster body's rather uncompromising slab.

In terms of looks, we must confess to more mixed feelings where these guitars are concerned. That may be because these two hark back to a period when the bods in charge at CBS-Fender were taking some pretty drastic liberties with the good old Tele. Rather than focusing on improving the playability and general quality of their guitars during the 1970s, the corporation seemed hell bent on change for change's sake.

The original Deluxe was – for '50s Fender purists at least – a clumsy looking mutant that mocked the



■ The large, '70s-style Fender headstock tends to divide opinion

traditional Tele's elegant simplicity. Twin humbucking pickups, a Strat-style ribcage contour, vibrato bridge and a large '70s-style Stratocaster peghead made for a curious mishmash of influences.

Still, the resurgent popularity of the '70s-era Deluxe and Custom Teles (no self-respecting indie band would be seen without one, or so it seems) has no doubt restored general confidence in the concept. On this evidence, the excellent playability offered by the Classic Player Deluxe Tremolo and Black Dove's 12-inch radius maple fingerboards certainly makes a convincing argument for their place in the current Fender canon.

While the Thinline and Black Dove feature Fender's standard four-bolt neck joint, the Deluxe Tremolo sports the infamous – but extremely practical, we might add – Fender Micro-Tilt neck design, characterised by its three-bolt neck joint and distinctive triangular neck plate. Inserting an Allen key into the small hole allows you to adjust the angle of the neck without having to fully remove it.

In practice, the three-bolt design actually works pretty well, while the 'Micro-Tilt' system features on the current American Standard line-up. Its dodgy reputation stems from the poor quality control that coincided with its introduction back in the '70s, rather than any shortcomings in the actual design itself. ➔



**“THE DELUXE PRESENTS A CURIOUS MISHMASH OF INFLUENCES”**

**GBVERDICT**

**FENDER CLASSIC PLAYER TELECASTER DELUXE WITH TREMOLO**

**GOLD STARS**

- ★ Good build and setup
- ★ Great rock tones
- ★ Vibrato works well

**BLACK MARKS**

- None

**IDEAL FOR...**

Anyone seeking a really effective rock axe

**GBRATING**





**GBVERDICT**

**FENDER CLASSIC PLAYER TELECASTER DELUXE BLACK DOVE**

**GOLD STARS**

- ★ Good build and setup
- ★ Powerful P-90 tones
- ★ Nice, playable neck

**BLACK MARKS**

- None

**IDEAL FOR...**

Raw, aggressive blues tones and no-nonsense playability

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**GBRATING**

★★★★☆



## “THE DELUXE BLACK DOVE HAS A STRIPPED FOR ACTION VIBE”

Certainly, the rock solid neck joints on all three of these Classic Player Teles inspires total confidence, while the tight neck pockets, smartly finished frets and properly cut nuts demonstrate once again that few can match Fender when it comes to mass-producing quality guitars at a reasonable price.

### HARDWARE & PARTS

The Thinline and Deluxe Tremolo models are both equipped with a pair of reissue ‘Wide Range’ humbucking pickups (see box on page 26), while a pair of Fender’s ‘Black Dove’ P-90-style single-coils give our third review guitar its name. This latter pickup has previously appeared on a number of short-lived models such as the Toronado and Strat-o-sonic.

The Deluxe Black Dove shares the same vintage Strat-style fixed bridge and through-body stringing as the Thinline, while the Deluxe Tremolo employs a Strat-style vibrato bridge (or ‘Synchronized Tremolo’, to use Fender’s terminology) with traditional, adjustable bent steel bridge saddles and a screw-in vibrato arm.

All three guitars use Schaller tuners with the vintage Fender ‘F’ logo stamped on the gear covers – a style that you’ll either love or hate! The finger keys look rather flimsy compared to the modern heavy-duty tuners fitted to American Standard



Fenders, but in practice they seem to work well enough.

The control knobs are also common across the range and come in the form of the skirted knobs used on many Fender amps. It may seem an odd idea but they do work well, providing plenty of grip and large, clear numbers. They also lend the guitars a consistent identity and look cool in a quaintly old-fashioned sort of way.

### SOUNDS

Ironically, there is virtually nothing of the classic Telecaster twang evident from any of this trio. What is on offer, though, is three highly individual performances that give each guitar its own personal slot in the line-up.

Starting with the Thinline, the semi-hollow design is often mistakenly written off as being prone to feedback and incompatible with high-gain overdrive. However, this couldn’t be further from the truth: the acoustic chambers’ natural resonance and

## DETAILS

GREAT PLAYABILITY  
AND CHARACTERFUL  
1970s-INSPIRED LOOKS



■ The reissue 'Wide Range' pickups are in fact not so different from a regular humbucker in design



■ The vibrato bridge on this Deluxe With Tremolo works very well and returns accurately to pitch



sustain is tempered by the stability of the solid timber sections, which helps to strike a workable balance between the stability of a solid body and the more airy sound of a hollow body.

The tone has a very engaging sweetness that is best summed up by saying that the hands of the clock had moved quite a bit between when we began playing it and the moment that we stopped, which is always the hallmark of a decent guitar. The suppleness of the Thinline's tone alludes to its Fender origins – it sounds nowhere near as dark as a Gibson ES-335, for example – but there is a quietly muscular smoothness that suggests that this is an extremely capable little axe that can take virtually anything in its stride.

The Deluxe Tremolo stands in stark contrast to its stable-mate. This is a real rock beast that aches to be played through an overdriven amp and thrashed until your fingers bleed! Subtle it isn't, but what looks like a bit of a badly conceived concoction of Tele, Strat and Gibson influences actually feels awesome to play and sounds as sweet as a nut.

The 12-inch-radius fingerboard lends itself to wide vibrato and sweeping tone-and-a-half bends, and while the neck feels a little chunkier than the regulation modern C shape, the superb playability lets the player get away with murder. The vibrato system on our review model has been setup to perfection. It's nice and bouncy and returns accurately to pitch every time, just so long as you don't go too overboard with the dive-bombing.

The Deluxe Black Dove's powerful P-90-driven sounds feel entirely appropriate given its stripped for action vibe. What P-90s may lack in terms of sonic detail, when compared to standard Fender single-coils, is easily compensated by their power and impressive dynamics. This guitar sounds raw and aggressive through an overdriven amp – almost thuggish at times – and its growl is much darker than that of a standard Telecaster. This menacing voice can be tamed to some extent, though, and when the gain is backed-off it softens enough to let each note ring through individually – which is the hallmark of a good Telecaster, ironically enough.

## GBCONCLUSION

### THREE'S A CROWD?

■ Are these guitars a success? Well, if you're a die-hard Tele fan, the Thinline is definitely the one to buy. It sounds different enough from a traditional Telecaster to justify adding it to your collection, while somehow retaining the Tele's understated elegance and style.

The extra playability of the 9.5-inch fingerboard radius is a definite plus and the versatility offered by the semi-hollow body also helps to make the Classic Player Thinline a winner. The Deluxe Tremolo might stir unhappy memories of the '70s but, plugged in, it redeems itself with some powerful yet sweet-sounding tones, a superb neck and an excellent and reliable vibrato system. That leaves us with the Black Dove. The extra grunt from those P-90s feels like a step up from a regular Tele while just about managing to keep a toe dipped in familiar waters. Blues players will probably love it. It still has a face that only a mother could love, but then again so do quite a few blues guitarists we know, so maybe there's a marriage made in heaven just waiting to be consummated... **GB**