

FIRST PLAY



**PRS S2 35TH ANNIVERSARY
CUSTOM 24**
£1,799

WHAT IS IT? Affordable USA-made S2 level celebration of PRS's calling card, the Custom 24

Celebrate In Style

One of three special PRS models to commemorate the brand's 35th anniversary, this S2 offers expanded sounds for half the price of the Core Custom

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As the original PRS guitar, the 24-fret Custom has certainly earned its place in guitar history. For this milestone year there are three celebratory models – all Custom 24s – starting at the SE level then moving to the USA for the S2 and topped off with the ultimate Core version.

While the Custom itself has constantly evolved over three-and-a-half decades and been the start point for the majority of subsequent PRS designs, it remains very much a halfway house between a Les Paul and a Stratocaster. In simple terms, it has the wood choice and construction style of the former but with the double-cutaway style and vibrato of the latter. A perfect hybrid? Its detractors, however, see this duality as its biggest failing: it's *not* a Les Paul and it's *not* a Stratocaster. While that discussion will continue as long as there are pubs and internet forums, what better way to celebrate this landmark design than with the 35th Anniversary S2 level? The halfway house of the celebratory trio.

At £1,799 and including a perfectly good gigbag, it's a well-aimed price point – like our trio of S2 McCarty 594s we look at later on in this issue – that puts it nicely in competition between Fender's American







1. The full width of the neck sits deep into the neck pickup cavity in original PRS style. The three-piece neck is different from the Core level, but tuning stability and overall intonation are exceptional

Ultra, Original and Professional ranges and Gibson USA's pricing on the first 'proper' Les Paul in the current line-up, the Classic, especially since the standard S2 Custom 24 has a full retail of £1,699.

While the two Custom 24s may appear very similar (aside from the 35th Anniversary model's celebratory truss rod cover), importantly, it's the way that the humbuckers are split to single coils that differentiates the two models. The standard model splits the pickups simultaneously via the pull-switch on the tone control, which gives you six sounds when used in conjunction with the three-way lever pickup selector switch. These are partial splits where some, but not all, of the dumped coil is still voiced via a different value resistor for each pickup. Our 35th Anniversary Custom 24 adds two mini-toggle switches, one for each pickup, to voice the full/split switching of the 85/15 'S' humbuckers individually, giving you eight

This Custom's clear, contemporary voicing might appeal more to those of us who simply need a lot of range from a single instrument



sounds. And like the circuit on the SE Paul's Guitar, we're hearing the true single coil (the slug coil) of each humbucker. Another change is that the 35th Anniversary version has a three-way toggle pickup selector; the standard model uses a three-way lever. Aside from that, specs and colour options are the same.

Outwardly, the primary difference between the Core-level Custom 24 and the S2 is the different top carve: the Core model is classic carved PRS; the S2 uses a mainly flat-top with almost SG-like edge chamfers. Consequently, the S2 looks more functional, reflecting its faster build time, but it's just one of a raft of changes that allows PRS to bring this S2 in at approximately 50 per cent of the cost of the equivalent Core model.

So, the neck here, while made of the same genuine mahogany as the Core guitars, is a three-piece design with a spliced headstock

2. Along with the now-classic headstock shape that allows near-perfect straight string pull over the friction-reducing nut, locking tuners ensure perfect return to pitch of the vibrato



PRS remains tight-lipped about its pickups, but these 85/15 'S' open-coiled humbuckers capture a 'hot vintage' vibe and are equally at home with gain or clean tones. Measured at output, we have DCRs of (full/split) 7.89/3.93kohms at the neck and 8.42/4.29k at the bridge

and separate heel stack. The body depth is 44mm, around 5mm thinner than the Core Custom; the one-piece mahogany back is approximately 32mm thick, with the centre-joined slip-matched maple cap being closer to 12mm. The grade of the figured maple is lower than Core and all the translucent colours are 'wrap-around' without the PRS hallmark natural edge 'binding'. Also, neither the rear control nor vibrato black plastic covers are recessed. Like the Core models, however, the S2s apparently use the same new nitro-over-cellulose finish.

Along with the manner in which they are made, it's the parts' costs that further differentiate the two levels. The S2, like the mainly Indonesian-made SEs, uses less-expensive Asian-made electronics and PRS-designed pickups. The Core pickups are made in the USA Stevensville factory

in Maryland, the pots and switches simply higher-spec parts. Country of origin plays a lesser part in the hardware: the S2 vibrato is a two-piece cast design used on both the SE and bolt-on CE models; the Core level, now in its Gen III specification, is machined from solid stock, but PRS is tight-lipped about its actual origin.

Under The Hood

Despite that unrecessed cavity cover, we have a standard PRS-shaped cavity, again unshielded like the Core models. Pots here are Alpha 500k audio taper. There's a slightly different-sized tone capacitor but of the usual PRS value of .033 microfarads and wired in 'modern' style. Each coil-split switch is a DPDT and voices (and isolates) the slug coil hence the term 'true' single coil. There's an additional 820kohms resistor wired between the input lug of the volume



3. The circuit on this anniversary model is typical PRS: 500k pots wired modern-style with a .033 microfarads tone capacitor. The two mini-toggle 'true single coil' switches are also used on the SE Paul's Guitar, while an additional resistor on the volume control 'tunes' the circuit



and ground, which means that the pickups ‘see’ an approximate 300kohms pot, more like the traditional 250k value used for single coils that subtly pulls down the high-end of the entire circuit. This little tweak is all a part of PRS’s ongoing TCI process.

Feel & Sounds

The Pattern Regular neck profile is “similar to the traditional PRS Regular neck found on guitars made in the late 80s at PRS’s former Virginia Avenue location”, states PRS. It’s the narrowest PRS profile at the nut – ours measures just over 42mm with a very contemporary depth of 21mm at the 1st fret and 23mm by the 12th – and is a very nicely shaped profile that almost hints

at a slight ‘V’ thanks to the well-tapered shoulders. Fretwire on the comfortable 254mm (10-inch) unbound rosewood fingerboard with its rounded ‘worn-in’ edges seems identical to the Core guitar in width, though slightly lower in height – perhaps a result of the differing production process here. Acoustic response is lively and resonant; setup and playability is superb, particularly the full fret access. Constructional details aside, there’s plenty of original mid-80s PRS style here.

Of our collection of 2020 PRSes, unsurprisingly, this one sounds most like, well, a PRS! We have the original scale length combined here with that in-tune vibrato and the 24-fret neck, and we’re veering back towards the Custom’s original Fender/Gibson hybrid style that is probably the reason why we’re still writing about PRS guitars today. Yet it wears its ‘modernism’ with a classic style: you won’t find graphite reinforced necks or stainless steel frets on a PRS electric guitar.

4. This S2 vibrato, also used on the SE and CE models, is a two-piece cast design based on the original PRS design. Notched pivot screws help provide excellent return to pitch; the arm push-fits into a plastic collar with swing tension adjustment

5. The true single-coil splits provide versatile duality. They differ from PRS’s partial-split style, plus the individual split switches give a total of eight sounds in conjunction with the three-way toggle switch

If you’re looking for that one hybrid guitar, this platform takes some beating, and those mini-switches are so easy and intuitive to use



PRS S2 35TH ANNIVERSARY CUSTOM 24

PRICE: £1,799 (inc gigbag)

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Double-cutaway solidbody electric

BODY: Mahogany with chamfered edge figured maple top

NECK: Mahogany, Pattern Regular profile, glued-in

SCALE LENGTH: 635mm (25")

NUT/WIDTH: Friction reducing/42.16mm

FINGERBOARD: Rosewood, bird inlays, 254mm (10") radius

FRETS: 24, medium

HARDWARE: PRS patented vibrato (cast), PRS designed low mass locking tuners – nickel-plated

STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 52.5mm

ELECTRICS: PRS 58/15 'S' Treble and Bass humbuckers (bridge); 3-way toggle pickup selector switch, master volume and tone, 2 mini-toggle coil split switches

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.37/7.4

OPTIONS: Colour only

RANGE OPTIONS: The standard S2 Custom 24 (£1,699) has the same colour options but different electronics. The Core Custom 24 starts at £3,459; the 35th Anniversary version is £3,799

LEFT-HANDERS: No. The only PRS lefty is the SE Custom 24 (£825)

FINISHES: Dark Cherry Sunburst (as reviewed), McCarty Sunburst, Elephant Grey, Faded Blue Smokeburst, Scarlet Red, Burnt Amber Burst, Whale Blue – all gloss nitro-over-cellulose

As we find with the S2 594s reviewed later in this issue, there's not a huge sonic gap between this and the CE 24, for example, with its USA 85/15 pickups. In fact, the true single-coil switching in combination with the 'tuned' volume control gives a very Fender-y clarity and character that you don't always hear from a split humbucker – we seem to have depth and sparkle in equal measure. And while the 85/15 'S' loves some hefty gain, there's a strident clarity that seems a perfect vehicle to drive a cramped pedalboard or multi-effects unit. Paul Reed Smith doesn't like 'ice-pick' high-end and we don't hear it here.

That said, of the five guitars we have on review across this special issue, this Custom has the clearest, most contemporary voicing, which might appeal less to vintage obsessives and more to those of us who simply need a lot of range from a single instrument. As with any good guitar, the volume control alone is a tone shaper – pulling back a little of the hi-fi sheen yet

with a dense pedalboard patch, that full-up sparkle is very welcome. Guitars like the CE 24 and certainly the Silver Sky will give you a woodier texture, but if you're looking for that one hybrid guitar, this platform takes some beating, and those mini-switches are so easy and intuitive to use. Along with its well-trusted vibrato system, it's a very stable guitar. Intonation is very sweet and it's an effortless player that in no way feels, or frankly sounds, cut-price.

Verdict

There are two things that non-PRS players don't like about PRS guitars: the 'posh' aesthetic and the price. The former, of course, is what put the brand on the map, and at this S2 level the latter is redundant. What the doubters haven't kept up with is PRS's continuous desire to make a better instrument. Average is not good enough. If you take your craft seriously, like PRS clearly does, this is a guitar that'll support your aims and dreams... and then some. **G**



PROS Cost-effective build, versatile sounds, in-tune vibrato, playability... Does production guitar making get any better at this price?

CONS Shame there are no opaque colours that really flatter the body contours; no lefties available