



FENDER MIKE MCCREADY STRATOCASTER

£1,649

A vintage-inspired signature Strat with effortless playability

A shining beacon in a sea of riff-heavy, punk-inspired grunge guitarists, Mike McCready's impeccable blues feel, Hendrix-esque chord work and earworm hooks have helped Pearl Jam stay afloat for over three decades – all while most of their contemporaries have sunk without a trace. Inspired by the likes of Stevie Ray Vaughan, Eddie Van Halen and Ace Frehley, Mike's classic rock approach to guitar helped define the Seattle band's sound – a sound players have been chasing since the early '90s.

Now, if there's one guitar heavily associated with the

there was one word to describe the new McCready and Fender collaboration, it's ambitious. Not only has Fender set out to make a wallet-friendly rendition of a Custom Shop smash hit, but they've also committed to imitating the wear and tear of the original guitar – no small feat, for sure.

Let's start by addressing the rather distressed and battered elephant in the room. At first glance, it really does look like an elderly guitar behind a counter in a small town, and from a distance, it appears unmistakably to be McCready's beloved Fender. All the large scratches, dings and scuffs are accounted for. However,

“IT MIGHT BE THE BEST FENDER NECK WE'VE PLAYED IN YEARS”

grunge icon, it's his battle-worn Fender Stratocaster. A fresh-faced McCready purchased his beloved Strat immediately after the success of the band's monumental debut album and he's used it on every record and tour since. He originally bought the beat-up six-string, believing it to be a 1959 model – and he even got a '59 tattoo to commemorate his favourite guitar. We can only imagine his surprise when Fender's Custom Shop informed him it was actually made one year later, in 1960.

Having already celebrated the guitar with a limited Custom Shop run, Fender has shifted to making a more affordable option. Now, if

once you remove the guitar from its appropriately retro case, you'll start to notice the slight limitations of the Mexican facility compared to the efforts of the Custom Shop.

The ageing is a courageous attempt and mostly on the money. However, we can't help but feel the relic'ing looks almost *too* precise in places. The scalpel-sharp lines and surgically removed sections of finish serve as reminders that you're playing an artificially aged instrument. If anything, the bare alder showing through the sparse sunburst patches is a little too clean. The guitar is missing the thousands of hours of sweat, blood and tears the

1 HEADSTOCK
Yes, the headstock does include that sizable chip from a live mishap with a speaker cab while performing with Neil Young in the band's heyday...

2 TONE CONTROL
To mimic the natural yellowing of the original guitar's plastics, Fender has swapped the standard white middle control with an aged white version.

3 TREBLE BLEED CIRCUIT
One non-vintage spec is the inclusion of a treble bleed circuit. This helps the guitar retain its bright presence while you adjust the volume.

AT A GLANCE

BODY MATERIAL: Alder

BODY FINISH: Road Worn Nitrocellulose Lacquer

NECK SHAPE: Slim "C"

SCALE LENGTH: 25.5" (64.77 cm)

FINGERBOARD MATERIAL: Slab Rosewood

FINGERBOARD RADIUS: 9.5" (241 mm)

FRETS: 21 Jescar Medium Vintage

PICKUPS: Custom Mike McCready '60s Single-Coil

SPECIAL ELECTRONICS: Treble Bleed Circuit

BRIDGE: 6-Saddle Vintage-Style Synchronized Tremolo with Bent Steel Saddles

CASE: Deluxe Brown Hardshell

CONTACT: Fender, www.fender.com





It's evolution!

McCready's glorified G transitions

In 2021, McCready joined a rather prestigious list of Strat players who have been honoured with Custom Shop creations. With Master Builder Vincent Van Trigt at the helm, Fender meticulously reproduced Mike's distressed Strat in excruciating detail. Every scratch, ding and blemish was noted and precise measurements of the neck and body were taken in an effort to make this CS version indistinguishable from the original. Featuring a two-piece select alder body, a flat-sawn flame maple neck with a '60s oval C profile, a flat-lam rosewood fingerboard with 21 vintage frets and Custom Josefina hand-wound pickups, this would be as close as you'd ever get to playing Mike's actual guitar. There was only one problem – the model was limited to just 60 pieces and had an eye-watering price tag of \$15,000. So, when news of a Mexican-made variant was unveiled, the guitar-playing community was buzzing with excitement.

original wears with pride. Perhaps that's your job!

Playability is where this guitar shines. This Strat is a player. The neck here is very slim – slimmer than you'd expect – and remarkably easy to navigate. Couple the slight profile with the heavily relic'd nature of its finish and you get a lightning-fast guitar that is addictive to play. Throw in the perfectly aged dots and flawless fretwork, and it might be the best Fender neck we've played in years – thanks, Mike!



Being a grunge legend's signature axe, you may expect hotter pickups onboard. However, McCready is a vintage gear hound and a massive fan of his guitar's original pickups. That's why Fender developed a custom set of '60s single-coils specially designed to reproduce the tone of their golden-age instruments.

These pickups sound superb and very convincing – one strum and we were transported to the swinging '60s. The tone is bright and responsive, all without sounding spikey or thin. These pickups have a retro charm that will surely put a smile on any vintage guitar fan's face. That said, it's not only throwback jangle this guitar can do – it distorts beautifully, taking maxed-out fuzz and face-melting gain in its stride.



It's fair to say heavily relic'd guitars always start a debate among guitarists, but what's not up for discussion is how good this particular guitar plays and sounds. This is a serious guitar that not only delivers a full-bodied tone but also has a neck that makes short work of anything you throw at it. It's no wonder McCready has the confidence to play this guitar on stage night after night on tour – perhaps it's a state of love and trust.

Daryl Robertson

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

ALSO TRY...

SQUIER CLASSIC VIBE '60S STRATOCASTER

£375

This is the most affordable '60s Strat available right now, and frankly, you'll be hard-pushed to find better value for money elsewhere.



FENDER VINTERA II '60S STRATOCASTER

£1,049

Aged guitars not your bag? The Vintera II offers superb playability and the vintage-style '60s pickups will help you achieve the sound you're after.



FENDER 1960 STRATOCASTER TIME MACHINE HEAVY RELIC

£4,849

This Custom Shop Strat is as close as you'll get to McCready's original guitar without actually purchasing a vintage example from the '60s.

