

FIRST PLAY



**CHARVEL PRO-MOD DK24
HSH 2PT CM MAHOGANY**
£1,059

WHAT IS IT? Recent addition to the DK 'Dinky'-shaped Charvel range, a surprisingly vintage-sounding, stripped-down hot-rod 'Strat'. What's not to like?

Raw Power

We all love our vintage-spec Stratocasters, but if you need to go up a gear or two, the Fender-owned Charvel brand is becoming the place to look

Words Dave Burrluck **Photography** Phil Barker

Is it just us or are Charvel guitars becoming rather classy? This Pro-Mod was launched at the start of this year and certainly caught our eye. It continues the theme of an instrument with progressive but pared-back and simplified style – a real rock staple without the ubiquitous double-locking Floyd Rose vibrato. Even the gold-plated hardware looks right against the light red-brown colour of the natural finished mahogany body and that 'caramelised' maple neck. In the flesh, we're just as impressed. It's a classy piece.

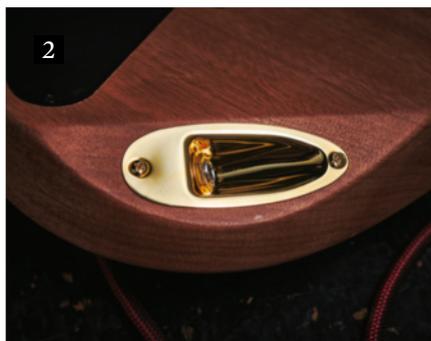
The roots of Charvel – as a hot-rod 'Strat' maker – remain very evident here. The slightly smaller 'Dinky' body shape, with its deeper cutaways, looks classic enough viewed face-on, but flip the guitar over and additional shaping is everywhere. There's the curved and domed heel, with its four screws inset in thick washers rather than a neckplate, a deep palm contour on the treble side joining the more usual rib-cage contour. Then there's that shaved edge where the Strat-type output-jack dish sits. It's actually a two-piece body, just slightly off-centre-joined, but it's next to impossible to see any glue line. The *au naturel* finish means that the sanding and this very light satin finish have to be perfect. And it is. The downside is that without a harder protective coating it can mark easily, but for many that natural ageing from playing and use is surely part of the attraction here.







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1. The classic headstock outline houses non-locking tuners and a slippery Graph Tech Tusq XL nut

2. This unusual placement of the output jack means it's easy to 'lock' your cable through your strap

3. There's plenty of contouring on the back of the guitar, not least the very rounded heel without the usual neckplate

Colour-wise, the caramelised or roasted maple neck is a near perfect match for the natural mahogany. And, in typical Charvel style, buried under the separate fingerboard are graphite reinforcing rods for stability and a dual-action truss rod with its easy-to-access wheel adjuster at the base of the neck.

The frets are big but not silly and sit on the compound 305mm to 406mm (12- to 16-inch) radius 'board. Of course, we also get

those glow-in-the-dark Luminlay side dots with just small-diameter pearloid dots to the face. The finish here is specified as 'hand-rubbed urethane'; it's clearly a light coat that has been burnished to a dull sheen, smoother than the similar finish used on Fender's American Acoustasonics, for example. With lightly rolled fingerboard edges, this finish combines to create a guitar that feels nicely worn in. It's a great weight, too.

A 24-fret guitar – even with this full 648mm (25.5-inch) scale length – means the three pickups appear quite cramped. They all direct-mount to the body (only the middle single coil has limited height adjustment), the almost unfinished industrial style of the pickup routs adding to the vibe. Controls are rear-mounted, too, so apart from giving the face a very clean, unfussy appearance, it means that any wiring mods you might want to undertake, not to mention pickup swaps, are all dead easy.

UNDER THE HOOD

A closer look at the heart of this Charvel

The rear control cavity looks well-crammed and, with a bit of poking about, you can see the 500k ohms EVH/Bourns low-friction volume pot and what looks like a CTS No-Load tone (with a .047 microfarad capacitor). As you'd expect, there's a four-pole five-way lever switch handing the different pickup connections.

The Seymour Duncan Full Shred is classed as 'medium output' with Alnico V magnet

and a measured DCR of 14.69kohms. This is rather different from the Alnico II Pro APH-1N humbucker at the neck with its classic rock reference of Slash and a measured DCR of 7.2kohms. Wedged between these 'buckers is a Custom Flat Strat SSL-6 single coil with flush Alnico V rod poles, overwound with a DCR of approximately 13k. However, that pickup is only voiced in positions 2 and 4 on the five-way, never on its own.



Although the rear cover is wrong, there's a full-size steel block under that vibrato



The control cavity is stuffed with cable, but remains very functional

Feel & Sounds

The all-steel Gotoh 510 vibrato should need no introduction – it's pretty much industry standard – and here it's recessed so the bridge plate is virtually flush with the top, as well as allowing an up-bend without tilting the vibrato or having it sit proud of the body. The only oddity is that a Floyd Rose-style solid backplate is used to cover the spring cavity. It should, of course, have an open slot so you can change your strings.

The system is completed with the more generic-style, perfectly functional rear-lock tuners, while the nut is Graph Tech



The lack of scratchplate adds to the stripped-down vibe and shows off the two-piece mahogany body perfectly

XL impregnated with PTFE for friction reduction. As set, it offers just under a tone up-bend on the top E and major 3rd on the G; the down-bend is generous, although if you really want to dump the strings it's less of what this is about. But for smooth Beck-style manoeuvres or beautiful Bigsby-like shimmers, it feels great and stays in tune.

Even if you're unsure of what's happening on that pickup selector, the five selections are quite distinct. At either end we have each full humbucker, while positions 2 and 4 introduce the centre single coil to the neck-facing single coils of each humbucker. The middle position then links both inner single coils of those 'buckers and creates some useful Strat and Tele-esque sounds.

The neck humbucker certainly isn't overblown, almost the opposite when switching direct from the clout of the bridge, and there's good clarity for quite a vintage-y vibe. The Full Shred at the bridge doesn't leap too much in power, though it is the hottest sound here and has an almost cocked wah tonality that adds considerable character and isn't a million miles away from the throaty roar of a Les Paul Junior. It's a good choice for this mahogany platform and another example of a pickup that's deceptively named.

The volume control has a very good taper and we'd encourage you to use it, as well as, the No-Load tone, which does its job very well, despite a pronounced notch at the top of its travel where it's bypassed. As ever, with a guitar like this there's a lot more to it than its primary gained purpose.

Specification rarely tells the whole story... there's power on tap plus a rootsy heart

The elephant in the room is the neck. In depth, it's actually very slightly thinner than the Charvel Henrik Danhage we looked at back in issue 468, measuring 18.9mm at the 1st fret and 21.2mm at the 12th. Compare that with the 21.1mm to 23.6mm of Fender's American Pro II HSS Strat and you see our dilemma. However, the back is nicely curved, certainly not a flat-centred 'D', and it's very stable and hard to flex, thanks to those graphite rods. With a low, fast action, it actually feels a little delicate, encouraging a lighter touch.

Verdict

Specification rarely tells the whole story and although that neck shape won't be for everyone (and you can't help but think a slightly fuller shape would dramatically broaden the appeal), this recipe is worth a try. With a very tidy build, this is stripped down and bare bones with quality hardware and pickups that are well suited to the lightweight, purposely functional build. It just wants to be thrown into a gigbag – which isn't supplied, by the way – and gigged relentlessly. An effortless player with little to get in the way, there's power on tap if you need but a vintage-y, rootsy heart. Greasy raw power, indeed! **G**



CHARVEL PRO-MOD DK24 HSH 2PT CM MAHOGANY

PRICE: £1,059

ORIGIN: Mexico

TYPE: Double-cutaway solidbody electric guitar

BODY: Mahogany

NECK: Slab-sawn caramelised maple, graphite reinforcement and Luminlay side dots, bolt-on

SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")

NUT/WIDTH: Graph Tech Tusq XL/43.3mm

FINGERBOARD: Caramelised maple with rolled edges and small dot inlays, 305-406mm (12-16") radius

FRETS: 24, jumbo

HARDWARE: Recessed Gotoh Custom 510 6-saddle floating bridge with screw-in arm, Charvel diecast locking tuners – gold-plated

STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 53mm

ELECTRICS: Seymour Duncan Full Shred SH-10B humbucker (bridge), Custom Flat Strat SSL-6 single coil (middle), Custom Alnico II Pro APH-1N humbucker (neck), master volume, No-Load master tone, 5-way pickup selector lever switch

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.31/7.3

RANGE OPTIONS: In Mystic Blue at the same price; made-in-Japan MJ DK24 HSH 2PT E Mahogany is £2,039

LEFT HANDERS: No

FINISH: Natural satin to body; hand-rubbed urethane to neck

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PROS Tidy build; neck stability; pickups and hardware; stripped-down vibe; fast setup and playability

CONS: Not everyone will enjoy the thin-depth neck; a gigbag would reflect its meant-to-be-gigged style