



FENDER CALIFORNIA SERIES KING VINTAGE

£779

Fender's regal dreadnought is a love letter to the company's past

Fender's legendary electrics tend to take centre stage when discussing the emerging guitar sounds of the early '60s. So much so, that while the Californian guitar maker's iconic models such as the Telecaster, Stratocaster and Jazzmaster enjoy their time in the sun, the company's acoustics are sometimes relegated to the shadows, forgotten to time. Well, not anymore. Fender has decided to shed some light on their early acoustic creations by introducing the California Vintage Series.

This retro-inspired range is populated by three distinct models, the Malibu, Palomino and the instrument we're looking at here, the King. Snuggly sat in its vintage-style hard case with sunshine yellow interior, this all-solid dreadnought looks every bit as retro as the real deal – albeit without the awkward screwed-on pickguard and garish neck plate of the original.

There's no doubt this guitar is a looker. Its aged natural top complements the handsome squared-off body shape, while the exotic wood grain of the Ovangkol back and sides shines through beautifully. The elegant Okoume neck is adorned with pearloid block inlays and crowned with a period-correct six-in-line headstock, culminating in a charming looking guitar that will certainly turn a few heads.

Sticking to the vintage yet modern ethos of the series, Fender has chosen a modernised V neck profile, which is surprisingly comfortable and fits our hand like a glove. The fretwork is tidy and the action is impressively low.

Under the hood, you'll find Fender's Performance-X bracing. This forward-shifted and scalloped design allows more top movement, which, in theory, should result in a fuller sound. To our ears, the King has a brighter quality than we'd typically expect from a dreadnought. The top-end sizzle is quintessentially Fender. There are plenty of mids, too. This guitar is sure to cut through the noise of a busy open-mic night and there's an abundance of character in the tone.

That said, we do feel it lacks the low-end of some dreadnoughts, and we find ourselves longing for bellowing, room-filling bass. Now, that's not to say this guitar is completely devoid of body, and its lighter presentation might well suit your needs – we'd just prefer a little more oomph.

However, the King sonically shines when plugged into an amplifier. The onboard Fishman Sonitone Plus electronics with under-saddle piezo and internal body transducer do a fantastic job at producing a natural-sounding tone that is clean and crisp. This series breathes new life into a mostly forgotten model, bringing it up to date for modern players. While excellent playability and drop-dead-gorgeous looks are no mean feat, at this price, the sheer value for money on offer is this King's crowning achievement.

Daryl Robertson

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

1 BODY This period-correct dreadnought shape is straight out of the '60s catalogue and even comes in a fetching Mojave sunburst finish.

2 HEADSTOCK Fender employs a maple cap to ensure this modernised guitar retains the appearance of the original model. This is the attention to detail we appreciate.

3 NECK This Fender's V profile neck is subtle and not to be confused with the feeling of a vintage Martin. It's softer and more rounded.

AT A GLANCE

BACK & SIDES: Solid Ovangkol
TOP: Solid Sitka Spruce
BODY FINISH: Gloss Poly
NECK: Okoume
NECK SHAPE: Modern V
SCALE LENGTH: 25.5"
FRETS: 20
NUT WIDTH: 1.69"
ELECTRONICS: Fender / Fishman Sonitone Plus
CASE: Vintage-Style Hardshell
FINISH OPTIONS: Aged Natural and Mojave
CONTACT: Fender, fender.com

