



FENDER HIGHWAY SERIES DREADNOUGHT

£949

One of a duo of new stripped-down, innovative and staged-aimed electros

Some see Fender as a fuddy-duddy heritage company simply churning out replicas from their past. And while they certainly do that, we've seen plenty of innovation in recent years, not least with their Acoustasonic range and the Tone Master digital amps.

This new Mexican-made Highway Series duo continue the innovation pioneered by the Acoustasonic designs, but instead of using Fender electric guitar outlines they resort to more conventional non-cutaway acoustic shapes: the larger dreadnought we have here and a smaller parlor model. Both use a large block of mahogany for the back and sides which is machined out to create the 'chambered' acoustic space, and you can buy both with either a mahogany or spruce top, and the mahogany necks bolt to the body. While the Acoustasonics use a complex two- or three-pickup set up, the Highways are way more straightforward with just that unique curved Fishman Fluence Core pickup at the top of the sound hole and top-mounted volume and contour controls. The simpler system is powered by a 9-volt block battery accessed in a separate cavity on the back.

While it looks mostly like a regular acoustic, the Highway feels rather different. Firstly, the body depth is virtually halved and feels a bit more electric-like, which is also the impression you get from the full 25.5-inch scale neck. Comparing our review model directly with an Acoustasonic Jazzmaster, the necks are very

similar, with the same 12-inch fingerboard radius and 'narrow tall' frets – very electric-like.

We certainly don't get the acoustic power or volume that you'd get with a similarly priced, traditionally-built dreadnought, but there's certainly enough for an unplugged jam with your mates or solo practice. Plugged-in, it's a very simple drive, and the sounds here remind us more of Fishman's Rare Earth sound-hole pickup than the crisper pristine voices of the Acoustasonic. In lower positions there's acoustic-like detail that seems fuller and more musical than many under-saddle systems. As you move up the neck it sounds a little more electric-like in a very bluesy, jazzy fashion – great for lead lines and solos, and works very well in open tuning with a bottleneck. To be fair, the contour control is relatively subtle in terms of its frequency shift, but this system not only sounds superb through a dedicated acoustic amp but we had loads of fun with our pedalboard and electric amp, not least due to the fact that the slimmer depth body is very feedback resistant.

So, while not a cheap date, it's a very cleanly made, stage-aimed electro that's far from cumbersome, looks like the real thing and sounds it too, but with plenty of potential for the player that wants to break the rules.

Dave Burriluck

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

1 BODY Unlike a conventional electro-acoustic, the back and sides here are machined from a solid block of mahogany with a thinline depth of 2.25-inches. Both Sitka spruce or mahogany tops are offered on both Highway shapes.

2 PICKUP The unique curved Fluence Core pickup is designed by Fishman, who also worked with Fender on the innovative Acoustasonic range. But the Highway doesn't use any DSP, it's a more simple, single source pickup system.

3 CONTROLS Again, more simple than the Acoustasonic, the Highway uses just a volume and a contour control: at one end of the control we have a full frequency voice, aimed at fingerpickers, and at the other we get reduced bass and pushed mids aimed at players working with a band.

AT A GLANCE

BODY: Chambered mahogany back and sides; mahogany top
NECK: Mahogany, bolt-on
FINGERBOARD: Indian rosewood
FRETS: 20, medium fine
PICKUPS: Fishman Fluence
CONTROLS: Volume and contour
HARDWARE: Vintage-style Fender six-in-a-line tuners
LEFT-HANDED: No
FINISH: Natural
CASE: No, gigbag only
CONTACT: Fender, www.fender.com

