

THE COMPETITION

SQUIER Classic Vibe Stratocaster

Fender really raised the game with this wonderful '50s inspired model, complete with alder body, maple neck and Alnico III single coil pickups

RRP: £279.99

VINTAGE V6MFR

Another well-made alder bodied S-type with a maple neck, Wilkinson hardware and locking tuners

RRP: £239

YAMAHA Pacifica

A well-established S-type model with a humbucker and two single coils, plus a great range of colours

RRP: £195

interested, Burns will be selling these mini Tri-Sonics as drop-in replacements for S-type guitars at £65 per set.

When the bridge pickup is selected the push/pull switch adds the neck pickup in series, and when the middle/bridge in-between position is selected all three pickups are combined. With the push/pull in the push position, the Cobra is configured like a regular S-type with a five-way switch, though the middle and neck pickups share a tone control.

The basswood body is a regular S-type with the usual curves and contours. The red finish looks good with the split green pickguard, matching knobs with verdigris lettering and the matching red headstock. The Burns-branded diecast tuners are of a very decent quality.

A generous slab of dark rosewood forms the fingerboard, with a 10" radius and medium frets. The bolt-on maple neck has a bi-directional truss rod and it feels fantastic, with a lovely slim early 1960s Fender feel, and the setup on our review guitar was spot on. As well as being supremely easy to play, the vibrato holds its tuning superbly.

SOUNDS

Although this is to all intents and purposes a Strat copy with Burns Tri-Sonic pickups, there's nothing about it to betray its budget price. It feels exceptionally well constructed and the unplugged tone is extraordinary. The Cobra sounds balanced, deep and woody,



Extra texture: a clever push-pull tone knob adds bridge/neck and all three pickup options to the regular five choices

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with a sweetly textured high frequency chime and lots of natural sustain.

The mini Tri-Sonics are billed as high-output low-noise pickups, and they were so quiet I had to re-check the specs to make certain they were single coils rather than stacked humbuckers. Reverse winding and polarity is quite a common method of bucking the hum in the in-between positions, but these are consistently quiet in all five settings.

The first word that comes to mind is 'refined'. These pickups have plenty of top end, but no harshness or wiriness. Output is pretty much on a par with vintage-spec Strat single coils, but the Tri-Sonics aren't as snappy or wiry. The string-to-string output levels are very nicely balanced, with a hint of natural compression that makes chords jump out with plenty of punch; thanks to the even response, single-note runs are a breeze.

In clean mode the bridge pickup combines a hint of quack with a throaty, scooped midrange. The mids fill out in the middle position and the neck adds an extra degree of mellowness without sacrificing any of the transparency. The in-between settings are spot on too, with just the right amount of phasiness and treble roll-off for a top-notch Robert Cray or early Knopfler vibe. So there's a tonal

consistency across the pickup settings rather than three wildly differing sounds.

Adding the neck to the bridge in series mode fattens things up without disproportionately raising the output level, although the tapered knob is hard to grip. This feature is particularly effective when you start getting into overdrive and fuzz, and the mini Tri-Sonics can cope with crunch because they never lose their clarity and definition.

VERDICT

Not everybody is going to appreciate the Burns style, but we think this is a real looker. It's also a pretty remarkable guitar; you'd be hard-pressed to find any S-type that plays or sounds better at this price. Burns will be 50 years old in August, and if the Cobra is anything to go by it'll be a happy golden anniversary. ↻

FINAL SCORE

Build Quality	18/20
Playability	18/20
Sound	19/20
Value for money	19/20
Vibe	18/20

TOTAL **92%**

Good for... **Brit pop, indie, rock, blues, funk, punk, ska**

Look elsewhere... **metal and jazz fusion**



The knife-edge vibrato works superbly and the strings return to pitch every time