

ROAD RAGE

Fender Road Worn Series Jazz and Precision basses

BY ED FRIEDLAND

THERE WAS A TIME when buying a Mexican Fender represented a tradeoff: lower price with lower quality. These south-of-the-border instruments have consistently improved each year, to where the instruments in Fender's Standard Series are not simply a good value but also musically satisfying. Now Fender has kicked up its line of Mexican-built guitars by several notches with the Road Worn Series basses, which use a higher grade of materials and feature a moderate relic finish that will tempt any vintage hound.

FEATURES

THE STARTING POINTS for the Road Worn Series are the classic Precision and Jazz bass designs. There are no real surprises here, just what Fender lovers crave: the familiar look, feel and sound that has defined much of popular music for the past 50 years or so. The Road Worn Precision model is based on the post-1957 ax: it has the wider, flatter C profile maple neck, a maple fingerboard and a 1 3/4-inch nut width. The gold-anodized aluminum pickguard and alnico split-coil pickup are familiar sights from this time period, as are the Two-Tone Sunburst and Fiesta Red finish choices. The Jazz is a Sixties design with a rosewood fingerboard, 1 1/2-inch nut width, a volume/volume/tone control arrangement for the two single-coil alnico pickups, and a four-ply tortoiseshell pickguard. It's available in a Three-Tone Sunburst or Fiesta Red finish.

Fender has reserved the best-quality alder slabs for the bodies and finished them with nitrocellulose lacquer. Nitro finishes are a key ingredient for vintage tone and looks. The thinner lacquer allows the wood to resonate and "breathe" better than a thick polyester coating, and it wears quicker, which gives the instruments a played-in vibe. However, these axes come straight out of the box looking like they've seen some miles. (If you like your Fenders shiny and new, check out the Standard Series models, which also benefit from higher-grade materials.)

Borrowing from the Fender Custom Shop's bag of tricks, the Road Worn

basses feature a restrained relic treatment: the gloss is worn down, typical wear patterns are sanded into the body and neck, the hardware is aged, and the pickguard is buffed to make it look used. The only thing missing is the classic burn on the headstock from cigarettes stuck under the E string. The overall effect is très cool but not as extreme as the Ultra-Relic Custom Shop instruments. While you can't buy mojo, these basses give you a head start, and it's liberating to have a new bass and not worry about getting that first ding or scratch.

PERFORMANCE

BEYOND JUST LOOKING cool, the Road Worn Series basses play and sound great. The higher-grade alder contributes to a very pleasant overall weight—none of the basses I tried weighed more than nine pounds. The P-Bass melted into my fretting hand as if it had been mine for years. It gave me the chunky bark that holds its own against the heaviest drummer. This is earth-moving equipment, made for digging out the sub-basement of a groove.

The Jazz also felt familiar immediately. The slim neck had been sanded down to a smooth finish, so there was no sticky gloss to get hung up on. The fingerboard edges have a soft roundness that gives you the sense this ax is an old friend. The throaty, articulate voice of the J-Bass is there, and its responsiveness is a testament to the improved materials, high level of detail, and quality control this series receives at the factory.

THE BOTTOM LINE

IF YOU ALWAYS wanted a vintage Fender (who doesn't?) but couldn't afford one, or if the Custom Shop Relic basses are still a little out of your reach, the Road Worn Series is a great option. At their core, they are excellent examples of Fender's classic basses, but with their relic finish and better quality materials, you could call them "instant classics." 🌟

PRO	CON
CUSTOM SHOP COOLNESS AT AN AFFORDABLE PRICE; UPGRADED MATERIALS AND NITRO FINISH MEAN BETTER TONE	NONE



FENDER ROAD WORN SERIES JAZZ AND PRECISION BASSES

LIST PRICES: Jazz, \$1,570.00; Precision, \$1,500.00
MANUFACTURER: Fender, fender.com
BODY: Alder
NECK: Maple, bolt-on
FINGERBOARD: Jazz: rosewood; Precision: maple
FRETS: 20 high profile, wide
SCALE: 34 inches
PICKUPS: Jazz: two single-coil; Precision: split-coil
ELECTRONICS: Passive
CONTROLS: Jazz: two volume and tone; Precision: volume and tone
NUT WIDTH: Jazz: 1 1/2 inches; Precision 1 3/4 inches



High-grade alder gives the best tone and low weight.

The relic finish gives you a head start on your own mojo.