

Turn a Strat into a Jazzmaster sound-a-like!

Here's what you do. Buy a cheap used Squier Strat and convert it. No, I'm not asking you to sell your mother, it really works!

Firstly, I have to say that I think the tone of a Jazzmaster is really fab and totally overlooked by many guitarists of all genres. But I, like many players, don't find the body that comfortable and I hate that silly vibrato/bridge arrangement where the strings frequently fall off the saddles. So my ideal Jazzmaster would be built onto a Strat style body and have not just two, but three pickups.

There are other good reasons for owning a Jazzmaster 'sound'. The neck pickup sound is not as boomy as a Tele or Strat and the bridge pickup, because it is straight across the strings, is not as sharp sounding on the top strings, but still has lots of twang on the low notes. So, here's a nifty little project which gives you 90%, or more, of the Jazzmaster sound on a comfortable Strat body, with a vibrato unit that works well.

Here's what you do. Buy a cheap used Squier Strat and convert it. No, I'm not asking you to sell your mother, it really works. And I can hear all of you saying... "You can't do that. It'll never work. What about the special pickups and bridge? Neah, it just can't be done!"

OK, you're entitled to your opinions, but look at it this way. Most of the Fender guitars are made of roughly the same materials, including the Jazzmaster. The pickups do look quite different, but they're not really that much different. I accept too, that the bridge is not the same, which reduces the sustain, but isn't it worth a try even if you get just 90% of the tone? And, you can pick up a used Squier Strat for next to nothing.

So what is it that makes such a big difference to the tone of all the different models? It's the pickup positioning under the strings that's the key. If this were not the case... why are guitars generally fitted with more than one pickup and at different locations? The Jazzmaster PUs are wider, I know, but the magnetic field at the edges of the pickup is quite weak, so won't affect the tone quite so much as you think.

With the Jazzmaster, I believe Leo was trying to create a feedback free version of the slimline semi-acoustic jazz guitars of the day, even down to the wide P90 like pickups that they usually had. Because P90 style pickups are so wide, it forces the poles further away

from the neck and bridge which affects the sound. This has a side benefit of filling more of the space, making it 'look' as if they're doing more than the regular slim style PUs.

Making the new scratchplate

In order to experiment yourself with the pickup measurements, and to get a standard result, you have to measure this to the exact centre line of the PU magnets, using the 12th fret as a datum line.

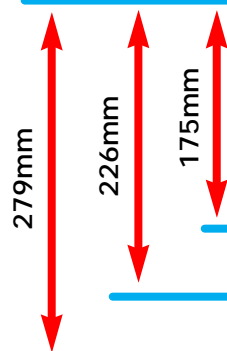
For example, the neck PU on a Telecaster is 165mm from the 12th fret. On a Strat, the neck PU is located at 168mm. That 3mm is enough to make a significant tonal difference. Most players can tell the difference between those two guitars. Sadly, the simple act of putting a Strat pickup on a Telecaster, or vice versa, makes no significant difference to the sound.

Looking now at the bridge pickup, the Tele has a much more acute angle than the Strat... so that would largely account for the sound being a lot more 'twangy' on a Telecaster, although the treble strings are more piercing than a Strat.

This is how I made mine. I bought a blank sheet of tortoise shell material from **WD Music Products (01233 820 082)** and used the old scratch plate as a template for the outline of the new one. You could make a temporary pick guard from stiff 'Daler' cardboard - available at all craft shops - this is what I generally do. You need to check that the pickup cutouts in the body will allow you to do this mod - my one

Here's the measurements

12th fret



Note: The neck has 22 frets, so the neck PU looks deceptively closer to the neck than it really is.



AWARD - SESSION

had 'swimming pool' cutouts, so no carving was necessary.

Then, I borrowed a 1964 Jazzmaster from a friend and measured the distance of the pickup poles from the 12th fret. With the new scratch plate attached to the Strat's body with masking tape, I marked the plate with the three new PU positions (centres), measuring carefully from the 12th fret. Then I removed the scratch plate and used the original Strat PU covers to mark the outline of the pickup cutouts at those new locations. As for the middle PU, I just put it back in its original location. So, the general idea is Jazzmaster sound with an extra middle PU.

The worst part of the job was cutting out the PU holes. I had to carefully cut the hole using my electric jigsaw and then finish them off with a round file. As for the 45° chamfer on the edges, I used a very sharp 1" chisel as a scraper to get the angle, just like a luthier might do it. It all worked out fine, as you can probably see from the photo. I was dead chuffed. After installing some decent **Award-Session SCS62 Matched Strat PUs**, I put the guitar back together and put on a nice set of 10-46thou **DR strings**... my fav's.

New wiring

Assuming you're happy with your progress, then all that's left to do is sort out some tasty new, but simple, wiring.

I have to say that I think the standard Strat wiring is a waste of time. I mean, why no tone on the bridge PU? What I am suggesting here is that the NECK tone becomes an overall tone and the remaining MIDDLE tone is changed into a mix control, allowing you to mix the two outside PUs together... which brings that wonderful Jazzmaster twin PU sound. This wiring mod should be done to all Strats, even if you don't do the Jazzmaster mod described earlier. It's dead easy and, on a standard Strat, gives that Tele twin PU sound in addition to all your other sounds without having to add switches and change the look of your guitar... great!

Conclusion

I have to say, I was totally gobsmacked by the sound... it was so easy to do and the rewards were fantastic. And, I have to say, I'm not usually a very impressionable person. By



the time I bought the Tortoise shell sheet and paid for the guitar, it had cost me just £105. The PUs were £135 more, but I could have used the original Chinese PUs at a push.

The first time I used it at a jam session near Portsmouth, a rather fine guitarist friend came up to me and asked how I was getting such a great sound... I then spent 10 minutes explaining what I had done. He was a bit confused though, because it looks like a Strat, he expects it to sound like one. But, it clearly does not sound like a Strat, otherwise he would not have commented on the sound I was getting.

This has been, for me, one of the best guitar projects I have ever done and has inspired me to write about it so others, with a little courage and skill, can also enjoy the rewards.

Yes, I know I'm a little nuts... but I like to have things that are different to everyone else. I don't like copying other players either, that's probably why I'm not interested in modelling amps... why just copy?

Have fun... Stewart Ward