

Fender Player Duo-Sonic SS

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I blame John Cheshier actually! Yep, totally his fault! If he hadn't told me about Manny Music (1/108 Botany Rd, Alexandria), which is the old Allen's Warehouse, and how good it was I wouldn't have gotten off the train at Redfern last holidays and walked there to check it out.

While checking Manny's out I played a variety of guitars, including a Danelectro Baritone Guitar and a Fender Player Duo-Sonic SS in Desert Sand colour. Even though I liked both guitars, I'd said to my girlfriend, Jocelin, that I wasn't going to buy any more guitars. So, I opted for a Mad Professor Little Tweedy Drive pedal instead, which was a lot cheaper and has a great Fender Tweed sound.



However, since playing the Fender Player Duo-Sonic in Desert Sand I've been haunted by the guitar! I kept thinking about it and then there was a review in Guitar magazine, front cover mind you and in Desert Sand!

Still, I resisted the temptation and kept the GAS addiction at bay. Then I noticed that it was going out of stock left right and centre as cluey people snapped it up. I noticed that Derringers had a price comparison online challenge, so I did I challenged them with the best price, and they dropped it by quite a bit. I was hooked!!! I paid online and within days it had been delivered.

I'd always thought that the Fender Player Duo-Sonic were beginner guitars due to their short scale length so haven't considered them in the past: *"most guitarists have considered a "beginner's," "student" or "entry-level" instrument ever since its debut way back in 1956.*

Over the years the humble Duo-Sonic has been a favourite "secret weapon" of numerous legendary guitarists, including Rory Gallagher, John McLaughlin, Mike Bloomfield, Johnny Winter and Jimi Hendrix.

The Duo-Sonic also played a significant role in defining the sound of New York's post punk and new wave movement in the hand of David Byrne, Patti Smith and Richard Lloyd and Tom Verlaine with Television."

(<https://www.guitarworld.com/gear/review-fender-duo-sonic-guitar>)

So, this was something I was discovering myself, that the Fender Duo-Sonic had its own sound and feel that's very different from my other electrics. When playing lead in the middle position it has almost Eric Clapton's "Woman tone", but with a Telecaster's neck pickup quack. Very tasty through that Mad Professor Little Tweedy Drive pedal into a Vox tube amp I can tell you.

Made in Mexico the Fender Duo-Sonic has a gloss polyester body finish, while the neck finish is satin urethane on the back while its gloss urethane finished on front. That "C" shape maple neck is special as the satin finish on the back is superb, while giving you a speedy fret surface. One thing that would strike most people when playing would be the short scale of 24 inches, with 22 frets, which would be perfect for beginners. For me it makes for easier bends and for some reason it is the perfect guitar for pinch harmony playing.

The pickups are Duo-Sonic Single-Coil, so you get a Strat like feel, but the middle position on the selector switch, between the two of them, gives you the optimum tone.

Only two controls of a Master Tone and Master Volume, with the latter being a bit sticky, although that will loosen up with use. I usually set and forget these controls, leaving them near maximum, anyway on most of my electrics.

The bridge is 6-Saddle Strings-Through-Body Strat Hardtail with Bent Steel Saddles. Although not as resonate as brass saddles, these give the guitar a great feel even when played acoustically. I remember when the Duo-Sonic was delivered at my work the other guitarists wanted to have a look see. One thing that amazed all of us was how the guitar sang even without an amplifier. For me this is the sign of a brilliant guitar, and this had that in spades for just \$875. Once I got it home and plugged it in, I couldn't stop playing it – its pure magic!

It has standard Fender tuning machine with chrome hardware, but one of the factors that make people stop is the Gold Anodised Aluminium pickguard, along with the maple neck and Desert Sand colour, this guitar jumps out at you. The Fender Player Duo-Sonic does come in blues and reds and in versions (HS) with a bridge humbucker, but in my opinion, this is the pick of the selections.



The only downside is that the guitar didn't come with a gig bag, so it sits in its box as the one I ordered from Derringers still hasn't arrived. I like the thicker Fender ones as they protect the guitar well, but they are out of stock.

A number of reviews about the Fender Player Duo-Sonic have said the same thing: *"Since its debut in 1956, the Duo-Sonic has found its way into the hands of genre-defining artists, becoming an underground sensation that helped create alternative music in the dingy clubs of New York City. A surprisingly hip guitar with upgraded contemporary features, this instrument features slick style and a unique sound that's perfectly at home in modern music."*

(<https://www.belfieldmusic.com.au/products/fender-player-duo-sonic-electric-guitar-mn-desert-sand>) This review I have to agree with as its perfect for modern music and it definitely has a beautifully unique sound like no other in my guitar collection. Some guitars really stand out and my Fender Player Duo-Sonic in Desert Sand definitely does. I'm soooo glad I bent to my GAS emotions as some things you shouldn't let slip by.



“The Duo-Sonic series of guitars were introduced as a two-pickup variant of the first offset Fender guitar: the Musicmaster. The original models were constructed from either ash, alder, or basswood, and underwent three slight revisions before being discontinued in 1969.”

“The guitar received three reissues – one Mexican-made re-release in 1993, and the second as part of Fender Squier’s Classic Vibe Series from 2008 to 2011. The final reintroduction of this axe took place in 2016 – where Fender unveiled the Duo-Sonic yet again as part of their new Mexican-made Offset Series. In recent years, Fender have combined their Offset and Player series of guitars to streamline their catalogue, finally allowing the Duo-Sonic to take their rightful place amongst their Caster counterparts. While their original purpose was tailored towards students, make no mistake. These guitars would serve guitar players of all skill levels well.”

“The playability of these guitars is off the charts. The body size of a Duo-Sonic sits between a three-quarter and a full-sized guitar – intentionally targeted at younger or smaller-statured players. However, at no times do these instruments feel like a toy. Complicated, frustrating jazz chords suddenly became feasible and within reach with the Duo-Sonic’s smaller frame and scale length. While its offset cutouts may ever so slightly differ from a Strat, the design still adheres incredibly well to a player’s body, in either a sitting or standing position. Comfort is definitely not an issue here.”

“Thankfully, one of the Duo-Sonic’s most distinguishing features have not been altered – their distinctive covered pickups. The Duo-Sonic was known for their specially voiced pickups, which allowed a player to easily rise above a band mix without dramatic EQ tweaks. Unlike a Stratocaster, the neck single coil is slanted downwards, allowing for a slightly increased presence in the upper midrange. This allows the Duo-Sonic to perform as a sonic chameleon of sorts; with a tone profile nestled somewhere between the throaty neck pickup of a Stratocaster and a Telecaster’s twangy bridge pickup.

“The tone knob is especially potent on the SS model. Roll it back a notch, and you’ll find yourself in glassy Strat territory. Leave it wide open, and you’ll achieve a fairly balanced voice with just a hint of a quack in the middle selection, and a jangly tone on the bridge. These pickup voicings work a treat for all sorts of surf/alternative rock – music genres deeply ingrained within the DNA of the Duo-Sonic itself” (<https://mixdownmag.com.au/reviews/electric/reviewed-fender-player-series-duo-sonic-ss-hs/>).



I can now understand why these guitars are disappearing off the guitar hooks at an amazing rate, especially just before Christmas. Imagine the joy and player satisfaction a young guitarist would get from one of these. However, it’s also a guitar an experienced guitarist would get much love out of. I know I’ll be playing it all Summer and songs seem to leap out of it. Wow!