

TELECASTER STETSBAR

A COMPLETE RETROFIT VIBRATO SYSTEM, BUILT FOR VINTAGE- AND MODERN-STYLE TELECASTERS? TIM SLATER TAKES IT FOR A DIVE...

The Stetsbar is an aftermarket vibrato system, designed to fit to an electric guitar without having to drill holes in your precious axe, or otherwise spoil the instrument's original features.

We've looked at a previous vibrato designed to fit Les Paul-style guitars (GB 40, December 2004), and now Fender comes under the spotlight with this latest version of the Stetsbar, designed specifically to fit the ever-trusty workhorse, the Telecaster.

TAKE IT TO THE BRIDGE

The complete Stetsbar kit comprises a floating bridge assembly and heavy-duty steel vibrato arm, plus a steel baseplate with a cut-out for the bridge pickup. The baseplate is drilled with two sets of mounting holes – one group of four holes fits vintage Telecasters, including 1970s models, while the three-hole option is compatible with all modern Telecasters from the early 1980s onwards. The kit also includes mounting screws and a neck shim, along with the thoughtful addition of a small plastic phial of Big Bends Nut Sauce; a lubricant developed especially to ease tuning problems on guitars with vibrato systems. It lubricates all the areas where strings touch metal, and helps prevent string breaks too – a neat alternative to pencil lead and Vaseline, vicar.

The Stetsbar vibrato works roughly along a similar principle to a Fender Stratocaster vibrato, whereby the mechanism 'floats' by balancing between the pull of the Stetsbar's springs and the opposing force of the guitar's string tension. Like Fender's



■ The neck shim compensates for the increase in string height

GBINFO

STETSBAR TELECASTER VIBRATO

PRICE: £259

MADE IN: USA

TYPE: Retrofit vibrato system for Telecaster-style guitars

FEATURES: Fully adjustable bridge, vibrato system, mounting kit, tools and instructions included

OPTIONS: Gold plated by special order only

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GBOPINION

STETSBAR

GOLD STARS

- ★ Easy to fit
- ★ Looks great
- ★ Doesn't mess too much with original tone

BLACK MARKS

- Unless you're a vintage purist, none

GBRATING



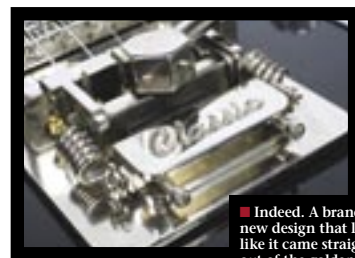
■ Suitably retro looks, but modern performance from Stetsbar

venerable vibrato, the Stetsbar is essentially a fairly simple design that works by virtue of good engineering, rather than relying on masses of nuts and bolts, with the main compromise being that the strings load directly onto the Stetsbar from above, instead of passing through the guitar's body in the traditional Tele fashion.

BEND ME, SHAKE ME

Fitting the Stetsbar is a fairly straightforward job, provided that you're well prepared. The basic installation process, including removing the neck and drilling the blank neck shim with four holes to accommodate the neck screws, takes less than an hour, and the most fiddly parts are setting the correct intonation and adjusting the spring tension to ensure that the unit sits correctly, and that it's moving smoothly.

The Stetsbar's rugged construction seems to suit the Telecaster's utilitarian feel perfectly. In use, the Stetsbar has a supple feel, and also a significant amount of travel;



■ Indeed. A brand-new design that looks like it came straight out of the golden era

we got it to raise the pitch a tone and a half above the original note before dive-bombing a long way down – pretty impressive stuff. Adjusting the spring tension to give the whammy bar a reasonably stiff, bouncy action seems to improve the overall feel and performance, thanks to the great design. Some Nut Sauce lubricant applied to the bridge saddles and top nut help the Stetsbar stay in tune perfectly once the strings are properly bedded in.

GBCONCLUSION

There have been production Telecasters with vibrato units in the past, not to mention the current models with factory-fitted Bigsby's, yet striking the balance between modern performance and vintage tone and looks has always been a struggle for fans of the Mighty T. The Stetsbar gets as close as anything yet, and is definitely worth a try, given the totally non-destructive fitting process. A quality, credible way of adding an exciting new dimension to playing Fender's celebrated plank. **GB**