



Stetsbar Pro II

FROM PAUL BIGSBY'S GROUNDBREAKING designs in the '40s to Fender's Synchronized Stratocaster trem to Floyd Rose and Gary Kahler's earth-shaking creations, vibrato systems have changed the way electric guitar is played. But what about players who want a vibrato bar on a guitar that wasn't originally designed to have one? Well, for the most part, your choices have included extensive modification of your instrument or . . . well, that's about it. Eric Stets built his first Stetsbar in the late '80s for his '71 Les Paul Custom. He patented his design in 1994 and began production in 2000. The nut of Stetsbar's design is a replacement trem that can fasten to your guitar without any drilling or routing of your instrument.

The Stetsbar Pro II (\$229 retail/street N/A) is the same basic design as the original Stetsbar, but with the ability to set the system for a "down only" bar, forgoing the Stetsbar's normal floating design and providing tuning stability if you break a string. It also allows you to bend strings without affecting the non-bent strings—for faux pedal-steel licks, for example—or drop your low-E to D without weirding out the guitar's tuning.

Our review unit came mounted on a Fender Telecaster with what Stetsbar calls a T-Style mount, which allows the unit to affix to the Tele without drilling any holes. Most excellent,

however, a formidable neck pocket shim is provided and it must be installed to get the correct neck pitch and string height. Setting up the Stetsbar's feel to your liking isn't difficult. For a supple-moving up and down bar, I simply adjusted the two stop screws to yield a wide up trem—damn near a major 3rd on the low E—and more than an octave drop. The silky smooth mechanics are a wonder to behold as the Tune-o-matic-style bridge glides effortlessly over the bridge plate, yielding a feathery, yet sturdy feeling trem. In fact, it's hard to dial out the Stetsbar's easy feel. Think of a smooth feeling Bigsby, or even Jazzmaster trem—but with way more stability—and you'll get the picture. For the Pro II setup, you simply tighten the two "tension adjustment screws" to block the upward movement. This worked extremely well, as I bent notes as far as I could and all of the other strings stayed in tune.

The Stetsbar's construction is impeccable, and aesthetically, the unit does yield a bit of refined hillbilly charm, especially on a Telecaster. The Stetsbar does its part to return your guitar to pitch, but as any vibrato bar geek will tell you, you need to make sure that the nut isn't binding, your strings are stretched and installed properly, and your tuners are up to the task. Props to Eric Stets for building a wonderful piece of finely tuned machinery that delivers on its promise 100 percent. —Darrin Fox

STETSBAR PRO II

KUDOS Probably the best after-market trem for non-trem guitars.

CONCERNS None.

CONTACT Stetsbar, (716) 675-0009; stetsbar.com