



Fender 75th Anniversary American Ultra II Telecaster

The Telecaster has a big birthday this year, commemorated by this golden wonder

BY CONNOR FLYS

▶ **WITHOUT WISHING TO** labour the point that every guitar writer will surely make at some time this year, it really is remarkable that the first commercially-produced solid-bodied electric guitar has survived 75 years with so few changes. It must surely be one of the world's greatest pieces of industrial design. Simple but with understated visual flair, durable but with modular components to allow for repair and reconfiguration and, as you'll know if you've heard an early Tele in the right hands, it had hugely potent musical qualities right from the jump too. A truly timeless design; its essential 'rightness' is as clear today as it was in decades past.

Consequently, those who'd seek to modernise the blueprint can only really do so much. Yes, you can contour the body, make some ergonomic adjustments, try different woods and pickups, but many players in 2026 will still happily take a Tele as it comes - more or less, how it came in 1956.

Where does that leave Fender and its top-end American Ultra range? One of the highest rungs on the fiscal ladder before the Custom Shop, it's best understood as Fender's own riposte to the posh Fender-derived modern guitars from Suhr, Tom Anderson and the like. These are not your grandad's Fenders; the same silhouette, but with all the accoutrements of modern guitar design.

That's what you see here - but with an added celebratory twist. To mark the Telecaster's 75th year, multiple anniversary models have been announced; at \$2,999, this special American Ultra II model is top of the tree.

Build quality

First impressions are dominated by the incredible color - a new Fender concoction named Liquid Gold. It's cool in photos but holy smokes, it's absolutely stunning in person. In different lights, it takes on vibrant shades of metallic gold, green, orange and bronze, and, to a car enthusiast, calls to mind the vivid pearlescent finishes adorning TVR sports cars. The application is as excellent as you'd expect for the price - including the matching headstock. Build quality in general is near faultless - with the caveat that the neck fit leaves a small but perceptible gap on the bass side of the pocket. The hardware is similar to the high-quality stuff used on the standard American Ultra II Telecaster, but in a classy Black Chrome finish to complement the black anodised aluminium scratchplate.

Playability

The usual cutting-board slab of a Tele body has been sculpted into something more ergonomic, and the weight is in the right ballpark for a Tele. Fender boasts that the quartersawn maple neck features 'Ultra Rolled Edges' on its 22-fret

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ebony fingerboard. These mimic the smooth, broken-in feel of a vintage neck, and are always a good thing to see listed on a spec sheet. Indeed, they feel superb here. The neck is a slim modern D-profile with a remarkably smooth and tactile satin finish; this, plus the comfort contours, make this Tele a joy to play.

Sounds

At the neck, a gold-finished Noiseless single-coil pickup, along the same lines as that of the normal Ultra model, but the bridge pickup breaks some new ground for Fender. Called the Fastlane, it's the company's first in-house single-coil-sized humbucker. This is the first guitar to receive it. All being well, it won't be the last, however; Guitar World's recent interview suggests that Fender has big plans for this pickup. Powered by rail magnets, it's also linked to two of Fender's S-1 switches - one puts it into parallel operation for a cutting twang, the other runs both pickups in series for thicker tones. In its standard humbucking mode, though, the Fastlane certainly displays promise. It's notably fatter-sounding than a normal Tele bridge pickup, of course, but with abundant clarity and definition, as well as a healthy output that punches through but doesn't overwhelm a clean amp. When running in parallel mode, it thins out and dials up the twang noticeably. It still doesn't sound like a trad Tele, but it's a fun and useful sound nonetheless. That Noiseless single-coil provides a more conventional neck pickup sound, which should deliver the goods for most players short of vintage tone buffs. The middle setting is particularly interesting, when combined with the S-1 switching for series/parallel at the bridge. Then, of course, there's the ability to run both pickups in series - and to change the polarity of the Fastlane in this setting too. Lots of sounds then, and not necessarily the ones you'd expect - but all of them are worthwhile anyway.

Verdict

There's no escaping it - this American Ultra II is one of the very most expensive Telecasters in Fender's series production range, and is \$700 more than the non-Anniversary Ultra II Telecaster model that shares a not-dissimilar spec sheet. It also competes with other high-end USA brands, although it's easily equivalent in quality. Plus, the Anniversary tag is catnip for collectors,

GUITAR WORLD VERDICT



This new Tele won't be one for traditionalists, of course, but it's a very cool prospect for anyone looking at a high-end modern Tele-type guitar. It has the 75th Anniversary kudos, the versatile electrics and that show-stopping finish, and it's an amazing-feeling, wonderfully playable instrument to boot.

PROS

- + The American Ultra spec enhances the Tele's usability to cutting-edge standards.
- + The new Fastlane humbucker is excellent, and the switching is very versatile.
- + That exclusive color is jaw-dropping.

CONS

- If you still want your super-Tele to do a traditional Tele sound, you might struggle here.

SPECS

MADE: USA
TYPE: Six-string electric guitar
BODY: Alder
NECK: Quartersawn maple, Modern D profile. Ebony fretboard with 75th Anniversary Custom Lap Steel inlays
FINGERBOARD MATERIAL/RADIUS: 10-14" compound
SCALE LENGTH: 25.5"/648mm
NUT/WIDTH: GraphTech TUSQ, 42.8mm
FRETS: 22, medium jumbo
HARDWARE: 6-saddle string-through Tele bridge with raw brass saddles, Deluxe locking tuners, Black Chrome finish.
STRING SPACING AT BRIDGE: mm
ELECTRICS: Bridge: Fender 75th Anniversary Fastlane single-coil sized rail humbucker. Neck: Fender 75th Anniversary Noiseless Tele. 3-way pickup switch. Volume knob with S-1 Switch for Series mode. Tone knob with S-1 Switch for Series/Parallel bridge pickup.
WEIGHT: 7.5lb/3.4kg
LEFT-HANDED OPTIONS: No
FINISHES: Liquid Gold, gloss urethane finish
CASE: Deluxe molded ABS case included

so it should hold its value - and with the new Fastlane humbucker plus the very comprehensive switching options, it does offer genuinely different sounds that aren't available in Fender's range otherwise. But I'm only half joking when I say that the dazzling Liquid Gold finish is worth the premium by itself.