

## GBINFO

FRET-KING  
SUPER 60 SP

PRICE: £729

BUILT IN: Korea

SCALE LENGTH: 648mm  
(25.5 inches)NUT WIDTH: 42.5mm  
(1.67 inches)STRING SPACING AT NUT:  
34.5mm (1.36 inches)

BODY: American alder

NECK: Canadian hard rock  
maple, bolt-onFINGERBOARD: Indian  
rosewood, 254mm radius  
(10 inches)

FRETS: 22 medium jumbo

PICKUPS: 2 x Wilkinson  
WHS single-coils  
1 x custom-wound P-90CONTROLS: 1 x volume,  
1 x tone, 5-way selectorBRIDGE: Wilkinson by  
Gotoh VS401V vibratoSTRING SPACING AT  
BRIDGE: 55mm  
(2.16 inches)MACHINEHEADS: Gotoh  
HIP locking tuners

WEIGHT: 3.6kg (8lbs)

FINISHES: Original vintage  
burst (shown), ice white,  
electric orange metallicCASE: Fret-King padded  
gigbag included

LEFT-HANDERS: No

FRET-KING  
COUNTRY  
SQUIRE SUPER S

PRICE: £629

BUILT IN: Korea

SCALE LENGTH: 648mm  
(25.5 inches)NUT WIDTH: 42.5mm  
(1.67 inches)STRING SPACING AT NUT:  
34.5mm (1.36 inches)

BODY: American alder

NECK: Canadian hard rock  
maple, bolt-onFINGERBOARD: Indian  
rosewood, 254mm radius  
(10 inches)

FRETS: 22 medium jumbo

PICKUPS: 3 x Wilkinson  
WHS single-coilsCONTROLS: 1 x volume,  
1 x tone, 5-way selector

BRIDGE: Wilkinson WT3

STRING SPACING AT  
BRIDGE: 54mm  
(2.12 inches)MACHINEHEADS: Gotoh  
SG3 sealed-gear tuners

WEIGHT: 3.75kg (8.2lbs)

FINISHES: Trans blue  
(shown), original classic  
burst, butterscotchCASE: Fret-King padded  
gigbag included

LEFT-HANDERS: No

## CONTACT:

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# ROAD KINGS

TOUTED AS 'WORKING VINTAGE GUITARS', WHAT DO THESE NEW AXES HAVE TO OFFER THE GIGGING GUITAR-SLINGER? **DAVID GREEVES** REPORTS

Perhaps best known for his range of guitar and bass bridges, vibratos, pickups and other replacement parts, Trev Wilkinson will also be familiar to many readers as the designer of the Vintage Advance range of instruments and the man behind Italia guitars. Clearly this is a man with more fingers in more pies than a production line worker at Fray Bentos.

For many years now, Wilkinson has also been producing guitars under the Fret-King brand. Combining the Wilkinson hallmarks of vintage looks and player-friendly features, sprinkled with liberal helpings of visual flair and mild eccentricity, these instruments have somehow managed to so far fly under the radar. This year sees the range ambitiously revamped and re-launched under the auspices of John Hornby Skewes & Co, also home to the Vintage Advance range.

The new Fret-Kings are split into two separate lines – Blue Label guitars, which are built in Korea, and the more

costly Green Label guitars, which are assembled in Wilkinson's workshop here in the UK. Crucially, the Blue Label guitars, such as the Super 60 and Country Squire models we are reviewing here, are made using the same quality parts and hardware as the Green Label instruments, and are subject to rigorous quality control.

## BODIES & NECKS

The Fret-King Super 60 and Country Squire are clearly inspired by the Fender Stratocaster and Telecaster respectively, but they're far from straight copies. There's enough originality and variation in the shape of the bodies and headstocks, not to mention the scratchplates and hardware, to give these guitars an identity all their own.

The headstocks adopt the Fret-King 'bat wing' shape (if anything, closer to a G&L peghead than a Fender), and this is mirrored in the stylish wave on the bass side of the three-ply plastic scratchplates. The Telecaster-inspired Country Squire's elongated metal

FRET-KING SUPER 60 SP & COUNTRY SQUIRE SUPER S



## THE FRET-KING FAMILY

OTHER OPTIONS ON THE SUPER 60 AND COUNTRY SQUIRE

■ If you like the look of these guitars but perhaps fancy a different pickup configuration, then look no further.

While the Super 60 SP we have here is fitted with a bridge P-90, should you prefer, the Super 60 HB (pictured below) replaces it with a powerful full-sized bridge humbucker.

Meanwhile, the straight Super 60 has three Strat-style single-coils. Apart from some different finish options, all three guitars are otherwise identical. The alternative to the Country Squire Super S is the Country Squire Super T, which is fitted with regular Telecaster-style neck and bridge pickups and a three-way pickup selector.



control plate, which accommodates a five-way selector switch set on a diagonal, and Stratocaster-style body contours also break with Tele tradition, while the Super 60 SP's chrome control knobs, streamlined Wilkinson vibrato and bridge-position P-90 pickup definitely mark this guitar out as not just another me-too Strat-style solidbody.

Both guitars feature a two-piece, centre-joined American alder body with a bolt-on Canadian hard rock maple neck. While alder is not the most eye-catching of woods, the glossy transparent finishes on these guitars ('original vintage burst' on the Super 60 and 'trans blue' on the Country Squire) reveal a rather attractive grain. This certainly looks like high-quality timber. The maple necks, which are attached to the bodies with four screws held in a metal plate, have been given a vintage-style yellow tint. The player-friendly satin finish on the backs of the necks is contrasted by the gloss finish on the front of the headstocks, a small detail but one that always helps make a guitar look that bit smarter from the front.

The Indian rosewood fingerboards are nice and smooth, and in both cases the 22 medium jumbo frets are very neatly fitted and finished – with a name like Fret-King, we'd expect nothing less! The necks have a nicely rounded C-shaped profile and the edges of the fingerboards have been smoothly rounded off to increase comfort. It's hard to imagine anyone not feeling instantly at home on either one of these Fret-King guitars.

The standard of setup is very good, with the 'Wilkaloid' self-lubricating nut on each of these examples having been expertly cut and the action set at



■ The Super 60 SP is fitted with a P-90 style pickup at the bridge

a sensible medium-to-low height.

It's impressive stuff, and while the £500-1,000 bracket is an exceptionally competitive place these days, you'd be hard pushed to find a better standard of fit and finish at these prices.

## HARDWARE &amp; PARTS

The Super 60 we have here is the 'SP' model, indicating that it's fitted with a pair of Wilkinson WHS single-coil pickups in the neck and middle positions, with a P-90-style pickup at the bridge. These pickups are wired to a five-way selector switch and master volume and tone controls, whose knurled chrome knobs sit slightly incongruously against the parchment white scratchplate. The vibrato bridge is another of Wilkinson's own designs, manufactured by parts giant Gotoh. It's a 'knife-edge' fulcrum vibrato that rests on a pair of slotted metal posts, with the tension of the strings balanced by a set of springs in a cavity that present a really smooth surface to the picking hand when palm-muting. They're fully adjustable and can be securely locked down with an Allen key. It's a solid metal unit, yet somehow the chrome plating on the sides of the bridge plate contrives to look a bit artificial.

The same could not be said of the Country Squire's chunky chrome control plate, home to master volume and tone controls and a five-way selector switch, which is set at an angle. This 'Super S' combines a pair of Strat-style Wilkinson WHS single-coil pickups with a Tele-style Wilkinson bridge pickup.



The Country Squire's bridge is yet another Trev Wilkinson design. The baseplate is solid steel, and it's possible to change the angle of the machined brass saddles to fully adjust the intonation of each individual string, as well as moving the saddles up and down to set the height of the strings. Unusually, the top and sides of the baseplate have a matte, grainy finish, apart from a small section in front of the bridge pickup, which has a contrasting shiny finish. This is admittedly neat detail, but when there's already so much happening on the front side of the guitar, it could possibly be one detail too many.

Up at the headstock, the Country Squire Super S comes fitted with a set of dependable but unremarkable Gotoh machineheads, while the Super 60 benefits from some slightly more upmarket Gotoh HIP locking tuners. Here the strings are locked in place by tightening the screws on top of the capstans with a flat-head screwdriver or, in emergencies, a suitable coin of the realm.

**DETAILS**

PLAYABILITY AND PERSONALITY ADD UP TO PLENTY OF FUN



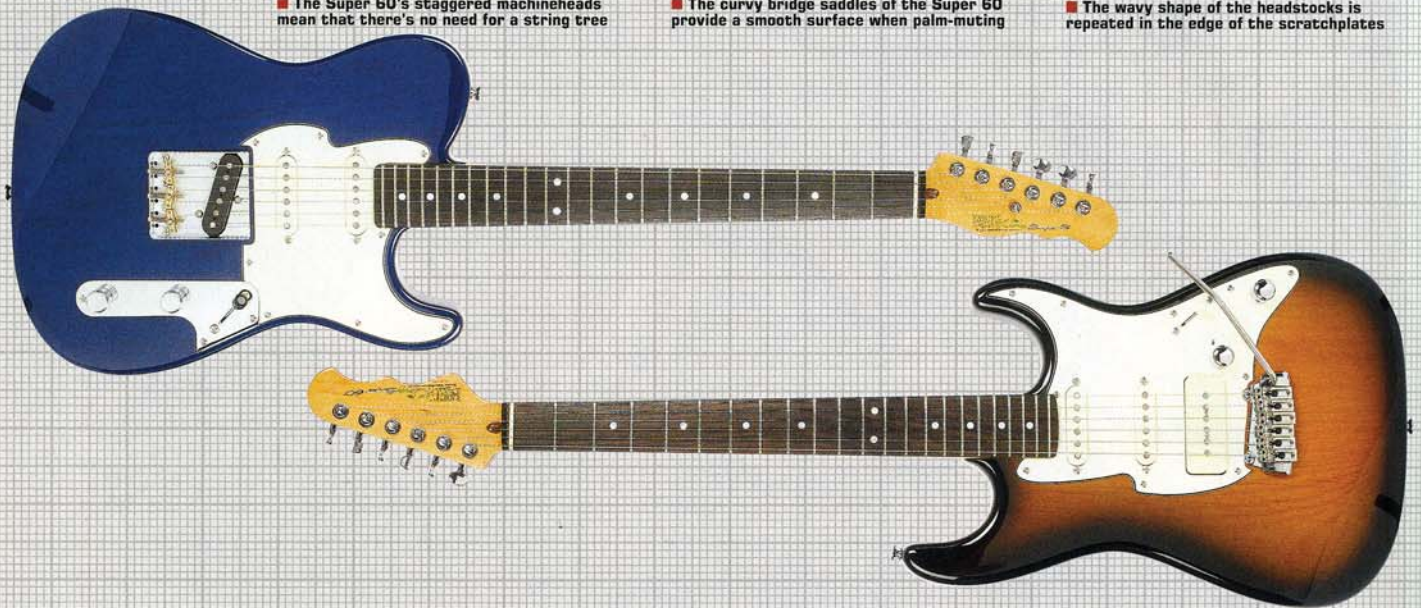
■ The Super 60's staggered machineheads mean that there's no need for a string tree



■ The curvy bridge saddles of the Super 60 provide a smooth surface when palm-muting



■ The wavy shape of the headstocks is repeated in the edge of the scratchplates



**GBOPINION**

**FRET-KING SUPER 60 SP & COUNTRY SQUIRE SUPER S**

**GOLD STARS**

- ★ Commendable setup and build-quality
- ★ High-quality hardware
- ★ Original looks

**BLACK MARKS**

- None

**IDEAL FOR...**

Anyone looking for a really playable guitar that's far from run-of-the-mill

**SOUNDS**

The Super 60 SP serves up a strong range of sounds in the Stratocaster mould, just as you might expect. There's a great sense of solidity and definition to the tone – it's bright and bell-like in the top end yet the guitar is never in any danger of sounding remotely thin or weedy.

The neck pickup is full and fruity, while the middle pickup offers more bite. The 'in-between', mixed-pickup sounds have an appropriate honk and rasp about them, especially when pushing into overdrive – the pickups' slightly hotter-than-vintage output is well-judged to suit both clean and overdriven sounds. The P-90-style pickup in the bridge position provides an extra kick of volume and aggression. The sound is still Strat-like, but with a bit of extra fatness.

Strapping on the Country Squire Super S, we're immediately impressed by the added comfort of the body's forearm and ribcage contours, something that we're used to on Strat-style guitars but is more of a novelty on this style of body. The sound of the guitar is an interesting

hybrid of the archetypal Strat- and Tele-style sounds, but considering the type of single-coil pickups used in the neck and middle positions that is not too surprising.

These pickups add some glassy top end to the snap and sustain of the fixed bridge and brass saddles. The sound is very crisp and bright, but not to the extent of being thin or unpleasant. We can see this excelling in a country context, and there's a good funky in-between sound to be had too. The bridge pickup offers a more straight-ahead snarl for rockier playing. Fat, warm sounds are not the Super S's strong point, however, and in this sense, the Super 60 is the more versatile of the two guitars.

**GBRATINGS**

**FRET-KING SUPER 60 SP & COUNTRY SQUIRE SUPER S**

BODY & NECK:	★★★★
HARDWARE & PARTS:	★★★★
PLAYABILITY:	★★★★
SOUNDS:	★★★★
VALUE FOR MONEY:	★★★
<b>GBVERDICT</b>	★★★★

**GBCONCLUSION**

**LONG LIVE THE KINGS!**

■ **In terms of looks, these Fret-King guitars offer an original spin on two classic blueprints, and the Super 60 and Country Squire combine impressive build quality and setup with tones that tick all the right boxes, at prices that are very competitive.**

The Super 60 SP produces a range of attractive and really useable sounds, with good sustain and excellent playability. The Country Squire Super S's palette is slightly more limited, tending towards brighter tones, but it nevertheless offers great performance at this price. Visually, both guitars are rather 'busy', combining contrasting styles of pickups and hardware. This could put off players with more traditional tastes, but if the look attracts you, we can't think of anything else you are likely to find fault with. We can see a lot of players, from beginners to seasoned pros, having a lot of fun with either of these guitars. **GB**