

# **ANNIVERSARY STRAT**

**Celebrating 40 Years of the Fender  
Commemorative Model Stratocaster**

First Edition

Gary Davies

This special edition is limited to 1,954 copies  
individually numbered and signed by the author.

OF 1954

GARY DAVIES

SALTASH CORNWALL UK

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*For Ella and Louie*

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*Michael Stevens holding his White Blonde Fender Custom Shop 30th Anniversary Founders Design Esquire.  
Courtesy of Fender. Photo by Henry Diltz.*





# FOREWORD

*"The meticulous collection of details  
is truly amazing."*

— Michael Stevens

## **BORN UNDER A BAD SIGN**

It is a fairly unanimous consensus that the CBS era, especially the late '70s, was the worst for Fender and for that matter Gibson too. The 25th Anniversary Stratocaster debuted near the end of that debacle and the production troubles encountered were nearly parallel to what was going on at Fender in general. But, the 25th Anniversary Stratocaster was the first of a long line of anniversary designated instruments and therein lies its importance. Even with its low player approval then and a value to mostly collectors and historians now, the 25th Anniversary Stratocaster is still number one on the list with its own unique story like all those that would follow.

I have read the whole manuscript except for some of the builder chapters and I think you will surely enjoy the ride. The meticulous collection of details is truly amazing. Some of the builders' faces and bios have been seen in other publications and on social media, but here you are privy to personal accounts, and provided with a unique insight into the specific projects they were assigned.

You will learn about the players and their instruments, the outside contractors and their stories, who came up with the ideas, and how it was dealing with outfits like Ford, Harley-Davidson and Playboy.

I assume that almost all who buy and read this book are guitar freaks and like everyone with a passion for something, suddenly found themselves bitten by that bug. Some of us were young when even the business was in its infancy. Others caught it later in life. I drove into Berkeley, California in late 1967 in a cloud of blue exhaust, consumed by an entirely different mission. Sometime in 1968 I stepped through the looking glass into the world of vintage guitars. Gary says his own particular passion started with an uneventful purchase of an Anniversary Strat. Within two years he was hooked!

I have yet to meet Gary in person, drink a beer with him or put a dent in a bottle of Tequila on my porch. I fully expect that to happen when the dust has settled. I have spoken to him several times and followed his journey on social media seeking out and talking to everyone he could in his search for the stories behind the guitars. Gary has pulled off a fantastic project that I think will soon stand beside the other great books about this company called Fender.





*Master builder Greg Fessler (right) presenting the author with a Stratocaster pickguard signed by the Fender Custom Shop crew. Photo by Linda Davies.*



# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Without the aid of a legion of supporters this book would never have seen the light of day. In particular, I owe a huge debt of thanks to the big-hearted folks who unselfishly shared their memories. Although I can never fully repay those who willingly granted me as much of their precious time as I needed and revealed their fascinating stories, at least I have the opportunity to thank them all right now.

My sincere appreciation goes to the builders, designers, executives, marketers, respected industry gurus, component specialists, technicians, independent artists, agents, and musicians who all responded so positively to my requests. I'm honored each and every one of those individuals felt able to put their trust in me, and getting to know many of them over the last few years has truly enhanced my life. I shall also be eternally grateful to everyone who contributed photographs, and granted me permission to reproduce their images in this book. Where possible and when appropriate, the source of each picture has been acknowledged and the photographer credited. Every effort has been made to identify and communicate with the image creators and rights holders, and if anyone considers their material has not been properly acknowledged they should contact the publisher.

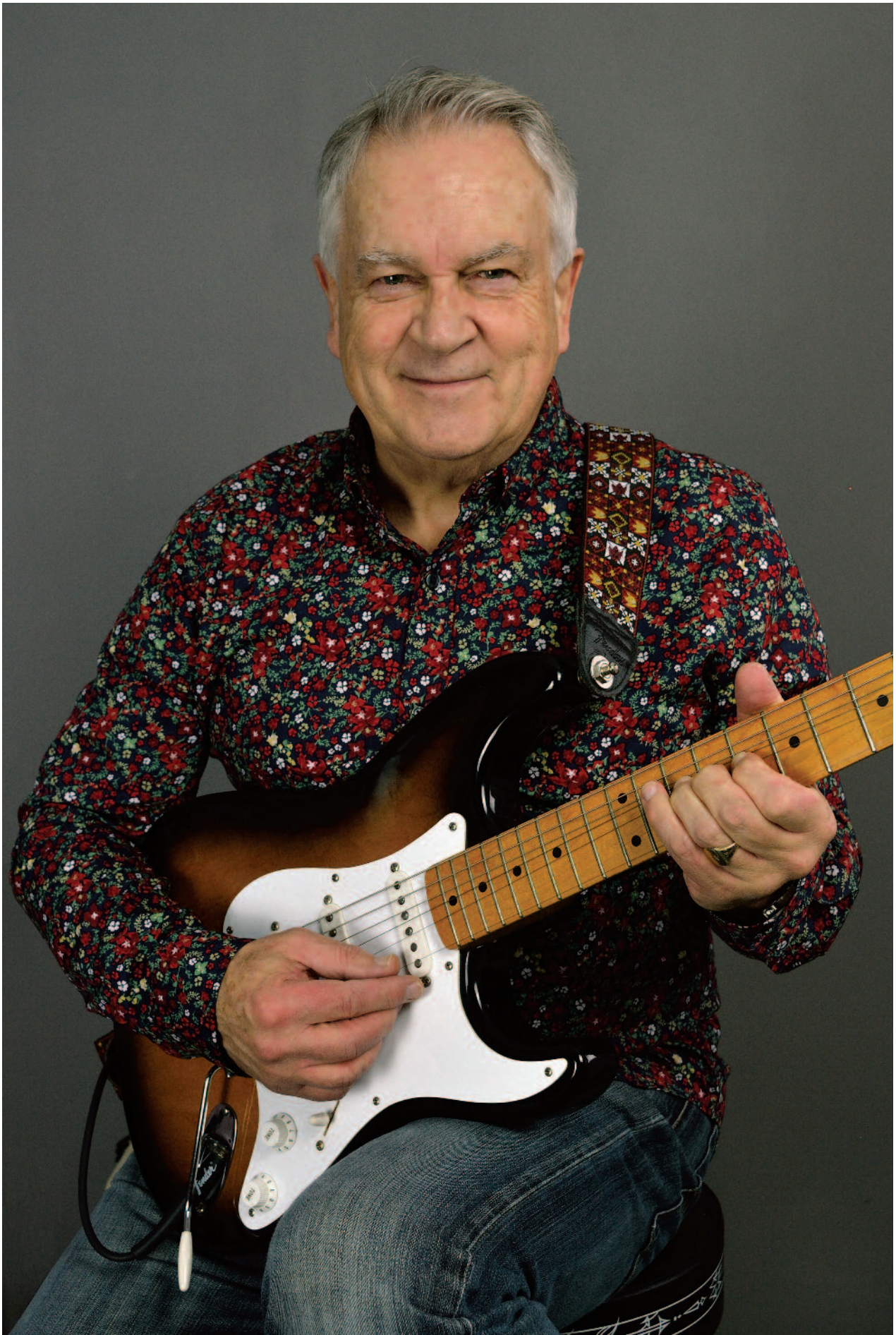
In order to successfully complete a project of this nature even the most independent, capable, hard-working, passionate, and inherently stubborn author needs to call on the expertise and goodwill of a long list of people. Although I admit to being somewhat individualistic and as stubborn as anyone on the planet, I'm glad to say that at least on this occasion I allowed common sense to override my mulish and maverick nature. Consequently, I was able to garner support from a good number of folks who searched, gathered, supplied and checked information on my behalf, set up meetings and conference calls, provided legal and copyright advice, obtained licenses, granted permissions, composed the foreword and one-liners, and undertook the proofreading. They all performed their crucial roles with care and alacrity, and I'm grateful to each and every single one of them.

To those individuals and especially to the generous and honorable people identified below at the vanguard, who went the extra yard without hesitation or complaint, this humble author extends his heartfelt thanks and everlasting appreciation.

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The author's special thanks also go to Fender Musical Instruments Corporation, Ford Motor Company, Harley-Davidson Motor Company, Jaguar Land Rover Limited, Playboy Enterprises International, Inc, and The Walt Disney Company.







# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

## GARY DAVIES

After a long and successful career as a marketer, writer, and training consultant with an international client list, Gary decided it was time for a change. He traded his business suit for a Fender Strat, and the outcome turned out to be far more electrifying than the amateur guitarist could ever have imagined. One or two more instruments soon found their way to Gary, and before long he was playing every day to improve his skills and technique. After resolving to learn more about the instruments he had acquired, Gary's casual information gathering soon evolved into a major research project centering on the objects of his desire.

The author and his wife live close to the border between the counties of Cornwall and Devon in the United Kingdom. Despite their rural location the couple travel widely, and when organizing anything from a short excursion to a lengthy tour, Gary always does his best to ensure the journey incorporates a visit to at least one guitar store. However, the self-confessed Fender nut elevated the regular musical instrument hunt to a completely different level in the summer of 2016, when that particular vacation ended up as more of a guitar fest than a family holiday.

During the British couple's memorable road trip around Southern California and part of Nevada in August 2016, Gary took full advantage of the opportunity to meet as many past and present Fender employees as possible. Besides visiting the Custom Shop in Corona and meeting all the master builders there, he tracked down even more Fender folks at various locations as far apart as Pismo Beach on the Pacific coast, and the vineyards of Temecula in the south. Gary even got the OK from his incredibly understanding wife to stay at Corona for a few days, and to visit nearby Riverside for a similar period of time a little later, just to increase his chances of meeting as many of the Fender crew as possible. For the record, the author is keen to point out that in the interest of family harmony a significant amount of time was also spent visiting the popular locations



*The author playing his 40th Anniversary Strat (above) during a guest appearance with Point Blank in Cornwall, UK, and pictured with the same guitar (facing page).*

that attract regular tourists in the region. So thanks to careful planning and a healthy amount of give and take, the couple's tour of Southern California was a resounding success. Gary and Linda also met a few more Fender folks and tracked down a unique Anniversary Stratocaster when they visited Japan in 2018.

The author freely admits his guitar playing didn't really get going until he picked up the instrument again relatively late in life. Most of the time Gary plays on his own or with friends purely for fun, but he does enjoy guesting with a local band or two whenever the opportunity arises.

He's written various business-related books, but this is Gary's first volume on guitars. More than four years in the making *ANNIVERSARY STRAT* is the author's most protracted and challenging project; it also happens to be his favorite work.

For more information about Gary, his latest books and other projects visit [www.garydavies.com](http://www.garydavies.com).

*“The designers and  
builders of these  
wonderful instruments  
are the lions; I just  
grasped the opportunity  
to roar on their behalf.”*

— Gary Davies



# INTRODUCTION

An extensively researched collection of stories about cool products and awesome people, *ANNIVERSARY STRAT* celebrates the diverse array of Fender commemorative model Stratocasters made in the USA.

*Part 1* chronicles these factory and Custom Shop guitars, and sheds light on how a few ended up in the hands of legendary players. More Custom Shop instruments are showcased in *Part 2*, as the personal stories of the master builders unfold and they reveal their favorite projects.

Anniversary model guitars have been released by Fender to celebrate significant milestones in the company's history since 1979. Consequently, an extensive range of commemorative instruments has shipped from the US factory and Custom Shop over the last forty years. Some distinctive and memorable Fender Strats have also been commissioned by third parties including publishers, motor industry manufacturers, entertainment organizations, and musical instrument stores, to celebrate their own noteworthy events.

The content is designed to appeal not only to Fender aficionados and Stratocaster nuts, but also to avid readers of general nonfiction books. By the way, I would not have dared to venture on this huge undertaking had I not been able to add something new to Fender-related literature. Thankfully, the various anniversary-related events that gave rise to such a disparate range of commemorative models generously provided me with the perfect opportunity to break plenty of new ground, and an equal measure of fresh stories. Purely for contextual purposes and especially for those who are unfamiliar with Fender history, brief references are occasionally made to key events that took place in the musical instrument manufacturer's early days.

Although most of these anniversary models tend to find their way to ordinary folks like me, a few have been owned, played, and enjoyed by well-known guitarists who have inspired countless players around the world. When I bought my 1994 40th Anniversary Limited Edition Stratocaster back in 2012, it wasn't a

big deal but it did pique my curiosity. By October 2014, I was completely hooked on Anniversary Strats and decided I should write a book about them. The original plan was to produce a basic guide for owners and buyers, and I thought the project would amount to just a six-month fling. As my long-suffering wife will gladly testify, it developed into an intense and passionate affair that seized control of my mind and dominated my life for more than four years.

While the guitars take center stage in *Part 1* of the book, the talented, passionate, and extremely hard-working people who design and build these iconic instruments gain a thoroughly deserved share of the limelight in *Part 2*. I sincerely hope that readers will be as enthralled by the various anecdotes as I was when I first heard them, whether they involve tune testing in the factory, building an instrument at the Custom Shop, or hand-painting a guitar in an independent artist's studio.

Because I financed the project in order to write the book I wanted to read, resources were limited and I didn't have the luxury of a photo budget. So I took some pictures myself, and obtained the rest from a bunch of generous people, including professional and amateur photographers, collectors, and dealers. Many of the Fender master builders also kindly sent me some photos, and I truly believe that collectively the pictures in this book add a special and uniquely personal flavor to the mix. Despite all my efforts I was unable to use some of the images I wanted because of quality, legal, or other reasons, and that explains why some chapters feature more pictures than others. Hey, while the end product might not be perfect, I can say with complete confidence that I gave it my best shot.

Enjoy and rock on!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Corey', with a large, stylized checkmark or flourish underneath.

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