

There are many different kinds of locking vibrato systems around, but this one might just be the first to appeal to vintage guitar owners...

# Super Vee

Review by Paul White

Anyone into heavy vibrato arm action will appreciate the benefits of a locking vibrato and locking nut system, but many of these necessitate modifying your guitar to make them fit. While they significantly improve tuning efficiency, they do alter the playing feel of the instrument slightly as the effective string length under tension is also changed. Perhaps the main gripe against them is that changing strings can be a real pain, requiring so many tools that you might be tempted to call out the RAC to do it for you!

## Fitting

The SuperVee looks very different to any other locking system I've tried before, and can be fitted to any Stratocaster or dimensionally similar instrument without the need to make any mods to the instrument's neck or body at all. It will fit in place of traditional six-hole vibrato units or the newer US standard two-point system, and all operations are completely reversible should you need to put

a vintage guitar back to its original condition for resale. Essentially you take out your existing vibrato system (except the springs and spring claw which you still use), you remove your nut, then drop in the new parts. The locking nut locates in the existing nut slot and comes with shims to achieve the correct nut height. Nuts are now available to fit a vintage fretboard radius of 7.25 inches, modern 9.5 inches and 12 inches. The company also offer nuts to fit custom fretboard radii all the way up to 14.75 inches. The 9.5 inch radius is correct for all recent standard Fender and Squier Stratocasters. A urethane adhesive is provided to secure the new nut assembly in the slot, though this can be removed without too much trouble if the guitar needs to be returned to stock condition.

You could simply slot the nut into place, but then it would fall out whenever you removed all the strings. Anyone competent enough to set up their own guitars should be able to fit the system in little more time than it takes to change the strings and do a basic setup, but if you prefer, any decent luthier should be able to fit it for you for a reasonable charge. Two Allen screws (one on each side of the nut) pinch the strings to lock them, so there's no hardware sticking up as with conventional designs, and the strings can be threaded through the nut slots normally prior to locking. One issue is that you never know quite how tightly to turn the bolts at the nut end to lock the strings firmly. If you're not careful, the force applied via the Allen key tries to lift the nut out of the slot, which may break the glue bond if you used the adhesive to fix the nut in place. Furthermore, although there is a hole in the end of the nut

assembly to allow you to reach the truss rod adjuster, you'll have to use the long leg of the Allen key to get through the length of the nut, leaving you with only the short end to lever with.

The bridge end of the system uses what the designers call 'Blade' technology to avoid the friction of the usual metal-to-metal contact, the idea being that this system will return to the original pitch with much greater accuracy than a traditional design. This works by flexing a piece of spring steel at the normal pivot point, so rather than the whole assembly rocking on the mounting screws, the front edge of the assembly is screwed down tight while the spring steel bends to give the required movement. Adaptors are available

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**Super Vee £199**

## Key Notes

- Double locking vibrato system.
- Low-profile nickel-plated bridge.
- Individual height-adjustable string saddles.

## High Notes

- Visually distinctive.
- No protruding parts.
- Very stable tuning.
- No need to modify your valuable instrument.

## Low Notes

- Not all multi-tools include an Allen key that will fit the Super Vee (mine didn't), so you have to take good care of the key that comes with the system.

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for the American standard two-post vibrato systems, though these cost an extra £30. Otherwise the unit screws down using four of the six existing screw holes. You still need to snip off the ball-ends from your strings (or reverse them) before clamping them into the bridge saddles, but unlike competing locking designs, these saddles are individually adjustable for both height and intonation. Because the saddles stand a little higher off the body than a stock Fender vibrato unit, the neck may need to be shimmed, but a correctly sized shim is included to maintain the same action as you had before. You may also wish to raise the pickup heights slightly.

As with other locking systems, tuners on the top of the vibrato unit are used to fine-tune the guitar once it has been nominally tuned and the nut has been locked down. The same size Allen key is used to lock the nut and to fix the strings at the bridge end, so you only need one tool to change strings. It seems the clamping arrangement at the nut end works on two groups of three strings, so you don't have to loosen all six just to change one string. However, the Allen key provided didn't seem to be the same size as any of the standard Allen keys on a typical Roadie Wrench, so you have to ensure that you don't lose it!

I mentioned this to the manufacturers, who say they are looking into a way of integrating a wrench into the end of the tremolo arm (presumably the end hidden inside the block) so you can't lose it.

### Impressions

This vibrato system certainly looks distinctive and has more than a hint of '50s Cadillac styling about it, but equally importantly, it has more or less the same playing feel as a traditional Fender Tremolo. The screw-in arm doesn't flop or slop around, so the engineers have got that important point right, and the whole thing feels beautifully smooth in operation with exceptional pitch stability, even after hooligan-style dive bombing. Fitting strings is faster than with competing designs, providing you have the right Allen key to hand, though not choosing a size common to other guitar multi-tools seems a bit perverse. I like the smooth lines of the nut where there's nothing nasty to catch your hands on, and overall the playing experience (other than the tuning stability, of course) is closer to that of an unmodified guitar than with any other locking system I've



tried. It's also impressive that you can fit this system to any instrument without modifying it, so you can use it on vintage instruments without compromising their value (as long as you retain all the old parts). Though I have pointed out a couple of nut features that I'm not 100% sold on, this is overall the best locking vibrato system I've tried so far despite its pro price tag. Apparently the nut and vibrato unit will be available separately, which may appeal to fans of graphite nuts and locking tuners, though the spring steel blade system is so effective that I'd also like to see a simple replacement for a standard vibrato using this pivot system. **iii**

