

First Magnitude

1976 FENDER STARCASTER BASS

PROTOTYPE

THE STARCASTER WAS a weirdo of a Fender. Introduced in 1976, it featured an idiosyncratically shaped headstock, boldly asymmetric body, and catawampus *f*-holes. Unusually for a semihollow guitar, it possessed a bolt-on neck with a 25 1/2-inch-scale fingerboard rather than the typical glued-in neck with 24 3/4-inch scale.

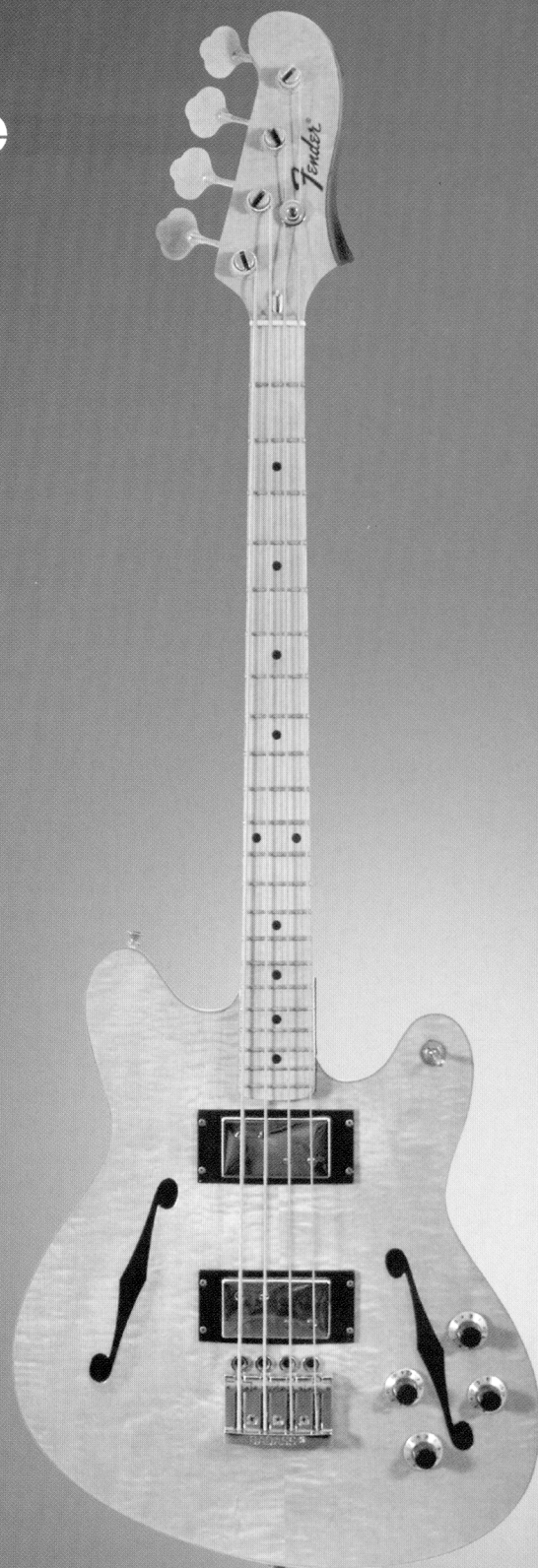
Upon its debut, the Starcaster was ambitiously priced at \$675 (without case), making it Fender's most expensive guitar at the time. The cost increased to a vertiginous \$1,025 (with case) the following year. Apparently, players thought the Starcaster more peculiar than deluxe, and it failed to find an audience. When the instrument was deleted from Fender's line in 1980, few mourners marked its passing. Years later, though, the model experienced something of a renaissance when notable alternative rock players like Jonny Greenwood of Radiohead embraced it.

The blonde Starcaster bass pictured here never had a chance to be rediscovered—or, for that matter, to fail in the first place. In fact, it never made it past the prototype stage. Only three examples have been documented, one of which is purported to have been lost long ago in a music store fire. "This bass is so rare that it cannot be found in *Gruhn's Guide to Vintage Guitars* or *The Official Vintage Guitar Price Guide*," says Josh Inglis, who helps curate the Vault, a repository for uncommon instruments at Chicago Music Exchange.

The bass is in pristine condition, boasting a handsomely figured maple body and a finish with minimal crazing. Badass bridge aside, the instrument is completely original, right down to its Fender Wide Range pickups, which are themselves something of a find: they are the only bass humbuckers with out-of-line polepieces that Fender ever made.

Inglis confesses that the staff of CME didn't have to go hunting to bag this beast. "This was acquired in one of those incredible moments when a random person walked into a guitar show with a large and odd case," he says. "We bought it off of him without knowing any details of its rarity."

—ADAM PERLMUTTER



FLA
19

Janu
The Co
off on
comm



April
Steve
Wozni
Comp



April
The R
their s
album



Deca
The S
severa
words
time T



Deca
Fredd
Dallas

