

First-Run Charvel Surfcasters (Serial Numbers 365XXX through 388XXX)

This article covers the first-run Surfcasters, built from 1991 to around 1996. Records suggest that the Surfcaster was conceived by Charvel in 1989 and a few prototypes were made during that year. These early prototypes have a chambered body with a Rickenbacker-inspired “slash” sound hole, are without serial numbers, and are close to the later production models except they have pointy headstocks with all the tuners on the top side like a Telecaster.

A few Surfcasters were manufactured in 1990, still with pointy headstocks and then, in 1991, the Gumby headstock was adopted with three tuners on each side. It was the Gumby headstock that transformed the Surfcaster from an ugly step-child into a retro classic.

Surfcasters changed a little each year with different pickup configurations and body colors until, in 1997, the less attractive headstock was adopted, the Jackson logo replaced the Charvel logo, and production moved from Japan to Asia (both India and Indonesia have been suggested). These later models are of poor quality and typically have all-solid rather than chambered bodies.

The first-run Surfcasters, serial numbers 365XXX through 388XXX, were manufactured at the Chushin Gakki factory in Nagano, Japan, not at the Fuji-Gen Gakki factory as commonly thought. Surfcaster serial numbers are commonly thought to start around 335000. However, the following web site illustrates a Charvel guitar manufactured late in 1990 with the serial number 358928:

<http://audiozone.dk/index-filer/charvel-japan-import-guitars.php#usa>

It is more likely that first-run Surfcaster serial numbers start around 365000 and run through 388000.

The first-run Surfcasters are considered boutique style guitars that employ many retro styles from leading manufacturers in the fifties and sixties. Their design was significantly different from other models made by the Charvel / Jackson Company that focused on the hard rock guitarist.

Surfcasters were picked as a “Pawn Shop Prize” by the Guitar Player magazine in July 2003 and this established them as a classic that is now highly collectible. Surfcasters with Chandler lipstick pickups are known for their open airy “twang” sound and were originally targeted at the Surf Rock and Country guitar player. Later models with a Jackson humbucker pickup in the bridge position were targeted at Metal and Pop guitarists.

An early endorsee was Steve Cropper of the Blues Brothers Band. Other well-known players are Bruce Cockburn, Scott Ian of Anthrax, Bilinda Butcher of My Bloody Valentine, Tommy Victor of Prong, and P. Paul Fenech of The Meteors.

(A) Body Styles

Regular Production Models:

1. 6-string with a tremolo bridge (TR-6), roller nut, 2 lipstick pickups, and a bound rosewood fingerboard.
2. 6-string with a “C” tailpiece (“C”-6), fixed compensated bridge, 2 lipstick pickups, and a bound rosewood fingerboard.
3. 6-string with a “C” tailpiece (“C”-6), fixed compensated bridge, a lipstick pickup at the neck position, a humbucker pickup at the bridge position, and a bound rosewood fingerboard. The body has “SFC-ET” ink-stamped in the neck cavity.
4. 12-string with a fixed compensated bridge (F-12), 2 lipstick pickups, and a bound ebony fingerboard. The body has “SFC 12” ink-stamped in the neck cavity.
5. 4-string bass with a fixed compensated bridge (B-4), 2 lipstick pickups, and a bound rosewood fingerboard. The body has “SFC-B” ink-stamped in the neck cavity.
6. 6- and 12-string double neck. The 6-string neck has a tremolo bridge (TR-6), roller nut, and a rosewood fingerboard. The 12-string neck has a fixed compensated bridge (F-12) and an ebony fingerboard. Both sides have 2 lipstick pickups.

Custom Models:

7. There is one instance known of a transparent red 6-string Surfcaster with a white Charvel logo, a lipstick pickup at the neck position, a humbucker pickup at the bridge position, and with a tremolo bridge and roller nut. A picture of this guitar, serial number 387354, can be found here: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/surfcasterguitars/5333838723/in/photostream/> Various other Surfcasters with this configuration have been customized. Their bridge pickup cavity has been routed to accommodate a humbucker pickup.

8. There's one instance known of a transparent green 12-string Surfcaster with 2 lipstick pickups. The headstock sports a gold medallion rather than the Charvel logo. A picture of this guitar, serial number 379247, can be found here: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/surfcasterguitars/5446987434/>
9. One additional custom 6-string body style is known. This style has a J-380 flat mount non-tremolo "strings-through-body" compensated bridge, a star-glo finish on a mahogany body, black Charvel logo, and 2 lipstick pickups.
 - Serial number 379163 is a left-handed guitar. Even the shark fin inlays along the fingerboard are turned around.
 - Serial number 380538 is a right-handed guitar that was custom built for Eric Clapton. A more thorough description of Eric Clapton's custom Surfcaster is found at the end of this document - see Footnote 1.

(B) Body Colors / Charvel logo Colors

1. Black body front and back with white Charvel logo. Body is normally poplar or basswood. A few examples are known with a mahogany body.
2. Emerald-burst (green to natural fade) body front with mahogany back and white Charvel logo. Only 3 are known, all having body style 3 - see (A) above.
3. Dark metallic green body front and back with white Charvel logo. Body is poplar or basswood. Only 2 are known, both of which have body style 6 - see (A) above.
4. Sea-foam green body front and back with white Charvel logo. Body is poplar or basswood.
5. Magenta body front and back with white Charvel logo. Body is poplar or basswood.
6. Transparent (quilted) orange body front with mahogany back and black Charvel logo.
7. Transparent (quilted) red body front with mahogany back and white Charvel logo. A few examples are known with a black Charvel logo.
8. Star-glo, also known as "cherry-burst" (red to yellow fade) body front with mahogany back and black Charvel logo. A few examples are known with a white Charvel logo.

9. Tobacco-burst (brown to natural fade) body front with mahogany back and white Charvel logo.
10. Dark metallic violet body front and back with white Charvel logo. Body is poplar or basswood. Only 2 are known, one of which has body style 2 and the other has body style 3 - see (A) above.

(C) Neck

All necks are made from 2-piece North American maple.

6-string necks have a bound rosewood fingerboard, pearl shark fin inlays, a 25.5 inch scale with 24 frets and either a 1-5/8" roller nut (tremolo bridge) or a 1-5/8" phenolic nut ("C" tailpiece).

12-string necks have a bound ebony fingerboard, pearl shark fin inlays, a 25.5 inch scale with 24 frets and a 1-11/16" phenolic nut.

Bass guitar necks have a bound rosewood fingerboard, pearl dot inlays, a 34 inch scale with 21 frets and a 1-5/8" phenolic nut.

(D) Body

All bodies are made of poplar, basswood, or a figured maple top on an African mahogany body. All models have a bound top with a single bound "slash" sound hole. Bodies have information ink-stamped in their neck cavities. There's a body style code - see (A) above. There's also what I believe is a year and month of manufacture. The year value is either some sort of Japanese symbol or a single digit number. The month value follows the year value, separated by a dash, and is a single digit number. For example, I believe the stamp "4 - 2" indicates February of 1994.

(E) Tuners

Tuners installed on all 6-string and 12-string body styles are Gotoh "Kluson" style tuners with enclosed machines. Sometime later, slotted Kluson style tuners are known to be installed.

Tuners on bass guitars are slotted with enclosed machines, manufactured by Jackson.

(F) Truss Rod

All truss rods in the 6- and 12-string and bass Surfcasters take a 7 mm nut driver.

(G) Truss Rod Covers & Pickguards

All truss rod covers and pickguards are made from 3-ply white pearloid.

(H) Pickups

Lipstick pickups: Chandler LST. “Vintage reissue of the lipstick tube pickup, medium output and a high resonant peak greatly enhance sensitivity and dynamics.”

Humbucker pickups: Jackson J-92C. “Smooth overdriven sound with a distinctive, crisp edge.” This “Made in USA” pickup has ceramic magnets.

(I) Pickup Selector / Tone / Volume Wiring Systems

All models having 2 lipstick pickups (i.e. body styles 1, 2, 4, and 5) share the same wiring system. The components in this wiring system are the neck and bridge lipstick pickups, the pickup selector, the push-push tone control with its double-pole double-throw switch, the volume control, and the output jack.

The neck pickup has red (+ve) and white (-ve) wires. The +ve is connected to the first side of the pickup selector, which is a 2-way wafer switch. The -ve is connected to ground.

The bridge pickup has red (+ve) and white (-ve) wires. The +ve is connected to one side of the double-pole double-throw (DPDT) switch coupled to the tone control and the -ve is connected to the other side of the DPDT switch. There are 2 green wires connected to the outputs of the DPDT switch. One of the green wires is connected to ground and the other is connected to the second side of the pickup selector.

The push-push tone control is a 250k ohm audio (log taper) pot in series with a 0.022 μ F capacitor. This pot is coupled to a DPDT switch that inverts the phasing of the bridge pickup in the “up” position. The wiper of the tone pot is connected to the volume control via a red wire.

The volume control is a 250k ohm audio (log taper) pot whose output wiper is connected to the output jack via a white wire.

(J) Bridge - see (A) above for Body Styles

Body style 1: Two-point hi-mass fulcrum JT-490 tremolo bridge with 6 individually adjusted string saddles.

Body styles 2 & 3: “C” tailpiece and J-390 bridge with 6 individually adjusted string saddles.

Body style 4: J-370 bridge with 12 individually adjusted string saddles.

Body style 5: “High-density” Jackson JB-340 bridge with 4 individually adjusted string saddles.

Saddle height screws are hex M3 (0.5 mm thread pitch) x 6 mm and take a 1.5 mm hex wrench. The intonation screws are cross-head M3 (0.5 mm thread pitch) x 17.5 mm. The octave-string intonation screws on a 12-string bridge are cross-head M2 (0.4 mm thread pitch) x 3.5 mm.

Footnote 1: Eric Clapton’s Custom Surfcaster, Serial Number 380538

In Star-glo (cherry-sunburst) finish, semi-hollow mahogany body with single sound hole, bound figured maple top, maple neck, twenty-four fret bound rosewood fingerboard with left-hand triangle inlays, two lipstick pickups, two rotary controls, selector switch, figured maple headstock facing in Star-glo, strings-through-body construction, base plate with six saddles, pearloid pickguard; and a gray hard-shell contour case with black plush lining; with two handwritten labels inscribed with various details including E.C. S.burst, Charvel custom non-tremolo Surfcaster; the back of the headstock signed by Eric Clapton in black felt pen.

Lot No. 66: Sold for \$9,150 inclusive of Buyer's Premium

Eric Clapton custom ordered this non-tremolo version of the Surfcaster and acquired it in the early 1990s. It features a strings-through-neck construction, a non-standard bridge base plate (J-380) with six saddles in place of the normal bridge/tremolo block and non-locking nut.