

DATING US-MADE FENDER STRINGED INSTRUMENTS

For most of Fender's U.S. instrument production history, production dates have been applied to various components.

Most notably, production dates have been penciled or stamped on the butt end of the heel of the neck of most guitars and basses, although there were periods when this was not consistently done (1973 to 1981, for example) or simply omitted. Neck-dating can be useful in determining the *approximate* age of a guitar, but it is certainly not definitive because the neck date simply refers to the date that the individual *component* was produced, rather than the complete instrument.

Given the modular nature of Fender production techniques, an individual neck may have been produced in a given year, then stored for a period of time before being paired with a body to create a complete guitar, perhaps, for example, in the following year. Therefore, while helpful in determining a *range* of production dates, a neck date is obviously not a precisely definitive reference.

Most specifications for a given Fender instrument model change little (if at all) throughout the lifetime of the model. While there have been periods of dramatic change—such as the transition periods between the Leo Fender years and the CBS years or the transition between the CBS years and the current ownership—most models are generally feature-specific and do not change from year to year.

Serial numbers are also helpful in determining an instrument's production year. For years, serial numbers have been used in various locations on Fender instruments, such as the top of the neck plate, the front or back of the headstock and the back of the neck near the junction with the body. Serial numbers were stamped on the back vibrato cover plate on early '50s Stratocaster® guitars, and on the bridge plate between the pickup and the saddles on some Telecaster® guitars.

But once again, due to Fender's modular production methods and often non-sequential serial numbering (usually overlapping two to four years from the early days of Fender to the mid-1980s), dating by serial number is not always precisely definitive.

DATING CHARTS

The chart below details Fender serial number schemes used from 1950 to 1964. Notice that there is quite a bit of overlap in numbers and years. The only way to try to narrow the date range of your specific instrument is to remove the neck and check the butt end of the neck heel for a production date, which may be stamped or written there (if you're uncomfortable doing this yourself, please refer to an experienced professional guitar tech in your area).

SERIAL NUMBERS	PRODUCTION DATES
Up to 6,000	1950 to 1954
Up to 10,000	1954 to 1956
10,000s	1955 to 1956
10,000s to 20,000s	1957
20,000s to 30,000s	1958
30,000s to 40,000s	1959
40,000s to 50,000s	1960
50,000s to 70,000s	1961
60,000s to 90,000s	1962
80,000s to 90,000s	1963
90,000s up to L10,000s	1963
L10,000s up to L20,000s	1963
L20,000s up to L50,000s	1964

Fender was sold to CBS in January 1965. Serial numbering didn't change immediately because instruments continued to be made using existing, tooling, parts and serial number schemes. The chart below details Fender serial number schemes used from 1965 to 1976. Notice that there is quite a bit of overlap in numbers and years.

SERIAL NUMBERS	PRODUCTION DATES
L50,000s up to L90,000s	1965
100,000s	1965
100,000s to 200,000s	1966 to 1967
200,000s	1968
200,000s to 300,000s	1969 to 1970
300,000s	1971 to 1972
300,000s to 500,000s	1973
400,000s to 500,000s	1974 to 1975
500,000s to 700,000s	1976

The charts below detail the most common Fender serial number schemes from 1976 to the present. Once again, there is quite a bit of overlap in numbers and years. The only way to try to narrow the date range of your specific instrument is to remove the neck and check the butt end of the neck heel for a production date, which may be stamped or written there (if you're uncomfortable doing this yourself, please refer to an experienced professional guitar tech in your area). Serial numbers with an "S" prefix denote the 1970s (signifying a CBS attempt to use serial numbers to identify production years); an "E" prefix was introduced in 1979 to denote the 1980s. As seen in the overlap of numbers and years, even these references to actual production dates are rather loose.

SERIAL NUMBERS	PRODUCTION DATES
76 + 5 digits S6 + 5 digits	1976
S7 + 5 digits S8 + 5 digits	1977
S7 + 5 digits S8 + 5 digits S9 + 5 digits	1978
S9 + 5 digits E0 + 5 digits	1979

S9 + 5 digits	
E0 + 5 digits	1980
E1 + 5 digits	
S9 + 5 digits	
E0 + 5 digits	1981
E1 + 5 digits	

1982 saw the introduction of the U.S. Vintage Series instruments and “V”-prefix serial numbers. The only way to definitively date U.S. instruments with “V”-prefix serial numbers is to remove the neck and check the butt end of the neck heel for a production date, which may be stamped or written there.

SERIAL NUMBERS	PRODUCTION DATES
EI + 5 digits	
E2 + 5 digits	1982
E3 + 5 digits	(For U.S. Vintage Series, check neck date for specific year)
V + 4, 5 or 6 digits (U.S. Vintage Series except '52 Telecaster)	
E2 + 5 digits	1983
E3 + 5 digits	(For U.S. Vintage Series, check neck date for specific year)
V + 4, 5 or 6 digits (U.S. Vintage Series except '52 Telecaster)	
E3 + 5 digits	1984
E4 + 5 digits	(For U.S. Vintage Series, check neck date for specific year)
V + 4, 5 or 6 digits (U.S. Vintage Series except '52 Telecaster)	

CBS sold Fender in March 1985. Serial numbering didn't change because instruments continued to be made using existing tooling, parts and serial number schemes.

SERIAL NUMBERS

PRODUCTION DATES

E3 + 5 digits	1985
E4 + 5 digits	(For U.S. Vintage Series, check neck date for specific year)
V + 4, 5 or 6 digits (U.S. Vintage Series except '52 Telecaster)	
V + 4, 5 or 6 digits (U.S. Vintage Series except '52 Telecaster)	1986
	(For U.S. Vintage Series, check neck date for specific year)
E4 + 5 digits	1987
V + 4, 5 or 6 digits (U.S. Vintage Series except '52 Telecaster)	(For U.S. Vintage Series, check neck date for specific year)
E4 + 5 digits	1988
E8 + 5 digits	(For U.S. Vintage Series, check neck date for specific year)
V + 4, 5 or 6 digits (U.S. Vintage Series except '52 Telecaster)	
E8 + 5 digits	1989
E9 + 5 digits	(For U.S. Vintage Series, check neck date for specific year)
V + 5 or 6 digits (U.S. Vintage Series except '52 Telecaster)	

"N"-prefix serial numbers denoting the 1990s were introduced in 1990. The numbers and decals were produced far in advance, and some N9 decals (denoting 1999) were inadvertently affixed to some instruments in 1990. Consequently, some 1990 guitars bear 1999 "N9" serial numbers.

SERIAL NUMBERS

PRODUCTION DATES

E9 + 5 digits	1990
N9 + 5 digits	(For U.S. Vintage Series, check neck date for specific year)
N0 + 5 digits	
V + 5 or 6 digits (U.S. Vintage Series except '52 Telecaster)	
N0 + 5 digits	1991
N1 + 5 or 6 digits	
V + 5 or 6 v (U.S. Vintage Series except '52 Telecaster)	
N1 + 5 or 6 digits	1992

N2 + 5 or 6 digits	
V + 5 or 6 digits (U.S. Vintage Series except '52 Telecaster)	
N2 + 5 or 6 digits	
N3 + 5 or 6 digits	
V + 5 or 6 digits (U.S. Vintage Series except '52 Telecaster)	1993
N3 + 5 or 6 digits	
N4 + 5 or 6 digits	
V + 5 or 6 digits (U.S. Vintage Series except '52 Telecaster)	1994
N4 + 5 or 6 digits	
N5 + 5 or 6 digits	
V + 5 or 6 digits (U.S. Vintage Series except '52 Telecaster)	1995
N5 + 5 or 6 digits	
N6 + 5 or 6 digits	
V + 5 or 6 digits (U.S. Vintage Series except '52 Telecaster)	1996
N6 + 6 or 6 digits	
N7 + 5 or 6 digits	1997
V + 5 or 6 v (U.S. Vintage Series except '52 Telecaster)	
N7 + 5 or 6 digits	
N8 + 5 or 6 digits	1998
V + 5 or 6 digits (American Vintage Series)	
N8 + 5 or 6 DIGITS	
N9 + 5 or 6 digits	1999
V + 5 or 6 digits (American Vintage Series except '52 Telecaster)	1999

“Z”-prefix serial numbers denoting the new millennium appeared on U.S.-made instruments in 2000. Z0 denotes 2000; Z1 denotes 2001, etc. American Deluxe Series instruments use the same dating convention, but with the addition of a “D” in front of the “Z”; i.e., DZ1, DZ2, etc. As always, there is typically some number prefix overlap and carryover from year to year.

SERIAL NUMBERS

N9 + 5 or 6 digits

Z0 + 5 or 6 digits

DZ0 + 5 or 6 digits (American Deluxe)

V + 5 or 6 digits (American Vintage Series except '52 Telecaster, which uses a five-digit number stamped into the bridge plate)

Z0 + 5 or 6 digits

Z1 + 5 or 6 digits

DZ1 + 5 or 6 digits (American Deluxe)

V + 5 or 6 digits (American Vintage Series except '52 Telecaster, which uses a five-digit number stamped into the bridge plate)

Z1 + 5 or 6 digits

Z2 + 5 or 6 digits

DZ2 + 5 or 6 digits (American Deluxe)

V + 5 or 6 digits (American Vintage Series except '52 Telecaster, which uses a five-digit number stamped into the bridge plate)

Z2 + 5 or 6 digits

Z3 + 5 or 6 digits

DZ3 + 5 or 6 digits (American Deluxe)

V + 5 or 6 digits (American Vintage Series except '52 Telecaster, which uses a five-digit number stamped into the bridge plate)

Z3 + 5 or 6 digits

Z4 + 5 or 6 digits

DZ4 + 5 or 6 digits (American Deluxe)

V + 5 or 6 digits (American Vintage Series except '52 Telecaster, which uses a five-digit number stamped into the bridge plate)

XN4 + 4 digits

Z4 + 5 or 6 digits

Z5 + 5 or 6 digits

DZ5 + 5 or 6 digits (American Deluxe)

V + 5 or 6 digits (American Vintage Series except '52 Telecaster, which uses a five-digit number stamped into the bridge plate)

XN5 + 4 digits

Z5 + 5 or 6 digits

PRODUCTION DATES

2000

(for American Vintage series, check neck date for specific year)

2001

(for American Vintage series, check neck date for specific year)

2002

(for American Vintage series, check neck date for specific year)

2003

(for American Vintage series, check neck date for specific year)

2004

(for American Vintage series, check neck date for specific year)

2005

(for American Vintage series, check neck date for specific year)

2006

Z6 + 5 or 6 digits	
DZ6 + 5 or 6 digits (American Deluxe)	(for American Vintage series, check neck date for specific year)
V + 5 or 6 digits (American Vintage Series except '52 Telecaster, which uses a five-digit number stamped into the bridge plate)	
XN6 + 4 digits	
Z6 + 5 or 6 digits	
Z7 + 5 or 6 digits	2007
DZ7 + 5 or 6 digits (American Deluxe)	
V + 5 or 6 digits (American Vintage Series except '52 Telecaster, which uses a five-digit number stamped into the bridge plate)	(for American Vintage series, check neck date for specific year)
XN7 + 4 digits	
Z7 + 5 or 6 digits	
Z8 + 5 or 6 digits	2008
DZ8 + 5 or 6 digits (American Deluxe)	
V + 5 or 6 digits (American Vintage Series except '52 Telecaster, which uses a five-digit number stamped into the bridge plate)	(for American Vintage series, check neck date for specific year)
XN8 + 4 digits	
Z8 + 5 or 6 digits	
Z9 + 5 or 6 digits	2009
DZ9 + 5 or 6 digits (American Deluxe)	
V + 5 or 6 digits (American Vintage Series except '52 Telecaster, which uses a five-digit number stamped into the bridge plate)	(for American Vintage series, check neck date for specific year)
XN9 + 4 digits	

A new serial numbering scheme was adopted toward the end of 2009 using the number “10” as a prefix, followed by a space, followed by seven digits. The “10” prefix was designed to identify the first year of the second decade of the new millennium, and while it appears on the instrument decals, it was not captured in Fender’s operating system. Only the seven-digit suffixes were actually entered into the database. These serial numbers did not identify the country of origin in the body of the number. Instead, the instrument's country of origin appears on the decal on the back of the headstock, near the serial number.

This new numbering scheme was short-lived and was replaced only a few months later by an improved scheme that identifies an instrument’s country of origin and year of manufacture in the body of the serial number.

This new scheme uses the letters “US” as a prefix to designate an instrument made in the United States, followed by an eight-digit number. The first two digits of the number identify the year of manufacture, (10 for 2010, 11 for 2011, etc.). The following six digits are the unit identifier, although it should be noted that these final six numbers are not sequential and do not provide any other identification information about the instrument. This new scheme is now used on the majority of U.S.-made Fender instruments, with exceptions including the American Vintage series and certain special-run instruments.

SERIAL NUMBERS

PRODUCTION DATES

“10” prefix followed by a space and seven digits (late 2009 through March 2010)	2010
US10 + 6 digits (beginning in about March 2010)	
V + 5 or 6 digits (American Vintage Series except '52 Telecaster, which uses a five-digit number stamped into the bridge plate)	(for American Vintage series, check neck date for specific year)
US11 + 6 digits	2011
V + 5 or 6 digits (American Vintage Series except '52 Telecaster, which uses a five-digit number stamped into the bridge plate)	(for American Vintage series, check neck date for specific year)
US12 + 6 digits	2012
V + 5 or 6 digits (American Vintage Series except '52 Telecaster, which uses a five-digit number stamped into the bridge plate)	(for American Vintage series, check neck date for specific year)

The “odd” serial numbers on the chart below exist somewhat outside the more well-known Fender serial number schemes. If you have what you consider an odd serial number, it might appear here.

NUMBER	DESCRIPTION
AMXN + 6 digits	California Series electric guitars and basses; 1997 and 1998
DN + 6 digits	American Deluxe series instruments; 1998 and 1999
NC(XXXXXX)	Squier® Strat Bullets (dating unclear)
FN(XXXXXX)	U.S.-made guitars and basses destined for export market. Some may have stayed in the U.S. or found their way back (made to Standard Stratocaster specs; dating unclear)
I(XXXXXX)	A limited number of these “I” series guitars were made in 1989 and 1990. They were made for the export market and have “Made in USA” stamped on the neck heel.
LE(XXXXXX)	Blonde Jazzmaster® and Jaguar® guitars with gold hardware made in 1994. Sold as a promotional three-piece set with a Blonde Deluxe Reverb® Amp
CN(XXXXXX)	Korean-made Fender/Squier guitars (dating unclear)
VN(XXXXXX)	
CA(XXXXX)	Gold Stratocaster; 1981, 1982 and 1983
CB(XXXXX)	Precision® Bass Special from 1981, CB(XXXXX) Gold Jazz® Bass from 1982

CC(XXXXXX)	Walnut Stratocaster; 1981, 1982 and 1983
CE(XXXXXX)	Precision Bass Special from 1981; Black and Gold Telecaster from 1981-1982
CD(XXXXXX)	Precision Bass Special (Walnut) from 1982
CO(XXXXXX)	
GO(XXXXXX)	Precision Bass Special (Walnut) from 1982, Gold Stratocaster from 1982-1983
D(XXXXXX)	Jazz Bass from 1982
SE(XXXXXX)	Signature Series Instruments SE8(XXXXXX)-1988, SE9(XXXXXX)-1989 SN0(XXXXXX)-'90, SN1(XXXXXX)-'90, SN2(XXXXXX)-'92, etc. SZ0(XXXXXX)-2000, SZ1(XXXXXX)-2001, SZ2(XXXXXX)-2002, etc.
SN(XXXXXX)	
SZ(XXXXXX)	
3 digits of 500	
G(XXXXXX)	“Strat” from about 1980, (Gold hardware, two-position rotary tone switch)
4 digits stamped on bridge plate	U.S. '52 Vintage Telecaster 1982-1988 (Check neck date for specific year)
5 digits stamped on bridge plate	U.S. '52 Vintage Telecaster 1988-present (Check neck date for specific year)
T(XXXXXX)	Tribute series instruments
C(XXXXXX)	Collectors Series
XN(XXXXXX)	FSRs and '52 Teles