



FENDER WINS LANDMARK COURT RULING PROTECTING THE ICONIC STRATOCASTER® BODY DESIGN

**DECISION REINFORCES FENDER'S COMMITMENT TO PROTECTING
ITS DESIGNS THAT DEFINE DECADES OF MUSICAL INNOVATION
AND CULTURAL IMPACT**

DÜSSELDORF, Germany (March 9, 2026) — Fender Musical Instruments Corporation (FMIC) has secured a significant legal victory following a ruling by the Regional Court of Düsseldorf that establishes broad legal protection for Fender's iconic Stratocaster® guitar body design under German and European copyright law. The decision creates enforceable rights against any guitars using the Stratocaster body shape that are manufactured, sold or distributed into Germany or other countries of the European Union (EU) - regardless of where those guitars are produced - reinforcing Fender's ability to protect its designs in global commerce.

“This ruling is a meaningful affirmation of the Stratocaster® as an original creative work and an important step in continuing to protect the integrity of Fender’s designs and intellectual property,” said Aarash Darroodi, General Counsel & Chief Administrative Officer Fender Musical Instruments Corporation. “It reinforces our commitment to originality, supports fair competition, and helps ensure that when players encounter these iconic Fender guitar shapes, they can trust the craftsmanship, quality, and heritage behind them.”

The case involved electric guitars offered by Yiwu Philharmonic Musical Instruments Co., a China-based manufacturer and seller of electric guitars, on the global online retail platform AliExpress, including for shipment into Germany. The court found that the guitars unlawfully reproduced Fender’s iconic Stratocaster® body design, which qualifies as a copyrighted work of applied art under German and European law.

The Düsseldorf court - regarded as one of the most influential intellectual property courts in Germany and Europe - confirmed that the Stratocaster® body design qualifies as a copyrighted work of applied art, reflecting original creative expression rather than purely functional design. The ruling aligns with a growing body of EU and German case law recognising that iconic product designs can benefit from full copyright protection, beyond traditional design rights. Crucially, it confirms that offering infringing products for sale into Germany or other countries of the EU is sufficient to establish liability, regardless of where a manufacturer or seller is based.

As a result of the ruling, Yiwu Philharmonic Musical Instruments Co. is prohibited from manufacturing, offering, or distributing guitars featuring the Stratocaster® body shape in Germany and the EU. Any future violations may result in fines of up to €250,000 per infringement, or up to six months’ imprisonment if fines cannot be enforced, subject to statutory limits.

Fender emphasised that the ruling does not restrict innovation or healthy competition within the guitar industry but rather that it represents targeted enforcement against clear cases of infringement, while continuing to support originality, new design, and creative progress.

For musicians, the ruling helps protect the authenticity and quality standards associated with Fender instruments, reducing confusion between genuine products and imitations while supporting the long-term value and collectability of original Fender guitars.

The decision also reinforces the protection of designs that have played a defining role in music culture for more than seven decades. Since the introduction of the Stratocaster® in 1954, Fender instruments have been central to countless cultural moments and have been played by generations of artists across genres, and have defined the sound of modern music for more than seven decades.

“The Stratocaster guitar is one of the most recognizable instrument designs in the history of music,” said Edward “Bud” Cole, Chief Executive Officer of Fender Musical Instruments Corporation. “Protecting the integrity of Fender’s iconic designs is essential to preserving the legacy of the artists and builders who shaped them. This decision reinforces the value of originality and ensures that the authenticity players associate with Fender continues for generations to come.”

Images of the Stratocaster guitar and executive headshots are available [HERE](#).

For additional information on Fender products, and to find an official retail partner near you, visit www.fender.com. Join the conversation on social media by following @Fender.

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FENDER MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS CORP. MEDIA CONTACT:

David Djukic

PR/Communications Manager, UK & EMEA

Fender Musical Instruments Corp.

ddjukic@fender.com

Press@Fender.com

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ABOUT FENDER

Since 1946, Fender has revolutionized music and culture as one of the world's leading musical instrument manufacturers, marketers, and distributors. Fender Musical Instruments Corporation (FMIC)—whose portfolio of owned and licensed brands includes Fender®, Squier®, Gretsch® guitars, Jackson®, EVH®, Charvel®, Bigsby®, and PreSonus® – follows a player-centric approach to crafting the highest-quality instruments and digital experiences across genres. Since 2015, Fender's digital arm has introduced a new ecosystem of products and interactive experiences to accompany players at every stage of their musical journey. This includes innovative apps and learning platforms designed to complement Fender guitars, amplifiers, effects pedals, accessories, and pro-audio gear, and inspire players through an immersive musical experience. FMIC is dedicated to unlocking the power of musical expression for all players, from beginners to history-making legends. In 2026, Fender celebrates 80 years of giving artists “wings to fly,” carrying on the vision of its founder, Leo Fender, and connecting players through a shared love of music.

CONTACT DETAILS

GLOBAL MEDIA INQUIRIES

Fender Musical Instruments Corporation
press@fender.com

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