



The CSE44 has a stunning top of waterfall bubinga

You won't drop your plectrum in these little soundholes!

£549

# OVATION CELEBRITY GUITARS

TG TESTS TWO OVATION CELEBRITY BOWLBACKS AND HOPES FOR AN A-LIST PERFORMANCE...

WORDS: HENRY YATES

> As early as the 60s, the rock community had established a set of ground rules: don't shit in the tour bus toilet, don't ask Ozzy to look after your pet bat and *never* build an acoustic guitar out of anything but wood. Fortunately, Ovation founder Charles Kaman wasn't familiar with these rules because he was an aerospace engineer. Deciding that wooden backs were actually detrimental to acoustic tone, Kaman invented a composite called Lyrachord, which he used for the body of the first Ovation model in 1966. And bugger us if it didn't change the world.

Since then, Ovation has established itself as the leading purveyor of bowl-backed acoustics, with everyone from Al DiMeola to Dave Mustaine rocking out on the bells-and-whistles US models. The revolutionary features of those premium models often filter down to Ovation's entry-level Celebrity line, prompting TG to bound into the office on the day the CSE44 and CC24 arrived, rubbing our hands together and grinning like a post-coital Cheshire cat.

## CELEBRITY CSE44 WFB

Frankly, it's a bit irresponsible of Ovation to launch the CSE44 WFB as part of the Celebrity Series. At £549, this electro-acoustic stunner is probably just a *little* more than you can really afford. The trouble is it's technically impossible to resist this guitar. We've been through the entire Ovation catalogue and didn't see anything saucier.

You want to know about the top, of course. Everybody does. While Ovation has stuck

to its Lyrachord bodies religiously over the years, it's kept interest up by using some of the world's most adventurous tonewoods for its soundboards. The waterfall bubinga featured on this CSE44 is a case in point – not only does it feature a stunning 'ripple' effect achieved by cutting wood from a diseased or distressed part of the tree, but it

price. The Advance Neck System featured on USA models doesn't make the transition either, but it hardly matters. The two-piece nato item on the CSE44 has a comfortable U-shape profile that filled TG's palm nicely, while the bound rosewood fretboard offers hand-dressed frets that are great for sliding runs and fluid technique. It looks stylish

*"The OP30 preamp tailors the tone via its three-band EQ, meaning you can unlock a suprising vintage boom from the Celebrity CSE44"*

should sound a bit different too. At the risk of pissing on the bonfire, TG should point out that it's not solid but laminate – a bit cheeky considering the £549 price.

Perhaps because the bubinga looks so good, Ovation hasn't broken the spell with a central soundhole, instead scattering two clusters of mini-holes across the upper bout and cutaway. Finished with exotic hardwood epaulets in the shape of autumn leaves, these add much to the visual package and allow for a Quintad bracing pattern that claims a superior balance of top vibration and stability. It's no surprise to find a Lyrachord bowl – an Ovation without one is like Jordan without her silicon – but it was a relief to find this was a mid-depth item, and not the bloaters we've tried in the past.

Life's little disappointments have taught TG to be realistic, so we appreciate there are going to be spec differences between the USA Ovations (which cost up to two grand) and the Celebrities (which go as low as £299). The laminated top is one of them. If you've seen the electronics on the top-spec'ed Ovations, you might argue that the CSE44's combination of OCP1K piezo pickup and OP30 preamp is another, although you should still have no complaints at the

and everything, but the decision to taper the fretboard might be a bit frustrating for technical players; it means you can't fret the top notes on the low strings.

Not everyone is a fan of Ovation's bowlback format. Naysayers will tell you these guitars sound 'too shrill' or 'lack the organic warmth of wood'. Those muppets would do well to check out the CSE44, which – while still pretty cutting, especially when you use a plectrum – has a great mellow response at the bottom end, and a nice swell in the mid-range to fill out strummed chords and fingerpicked passages. OK, so maybe you'll get more warmth from traditional acoustics when you're unplugged, but the OP30 helps tailor the tone via its three-band EQ, meaning you can unlock a surprising vintage-sounding 'boom' from this model if you put your mind to it.

All in all, this Celebrity turns in an A-list performance. But then, it bloody should do for price of £549.

**FOR:** *Classy tone, stunning looks*  
**AGAINST:** *It's the most expensive Celebrity, laminate top, tapered fretboard*

TG RATING:



### WHO'S IT FOR?

Singer-songwriters and gigging guitarists with an eye for beauty...

### INFORMATION

**ORIGIN:** Korea  
**BODY:** US-made mid-depth Lyrachord bowl  
**TOP:** Waterfall bubinga, with multi soundholes and exotic hardwood epaulets  
**NECK:** Two-piece nato with two-way truss rod  
**FINGERBOARD:** Bound rosewood, with micro elite abalone inlays  
**FRETS:** 23 (cutaway fingerboard)  
**SCALE:** 25"  
**PICKUPS:** OCP1K undersaddle pickup and OP30 preamp  
**CONTROLS:** 3-band EQ, mid-shift, pre-shape  
**HARDWARE:** Walnut bridge and gold Ovation tuners  
**FINISH:** Natural  
**CASE:** No  
**LEFT-HANDERS:** No  
**CONTACT:** John Hornby Skewes  
**WEB:** www.jhs.co.uk

The CC24 features a genuine US-made Lyrachord bow



£299

This OB4BT preamp features a useful built-in tuner

## CELEBRITY CC24

Let's put this in terms that *Heat* readers might understand. If the CSE44 was a celebrity, it'd probably be someone like Kate Moss or George Clooney. The CC24, on the other hand, would be more like Handy Andy or Gillian McKeith – not quite as cool to be seen with, perhaps, but still enough to make you look twice when you pass it on the street.

Ovation builds the CC range in China and refers to them as 'foundation level' models. Considering the CC24 is the cheapest Celebrity model on Ovation's books, the luthier has pulled out an admirable number of stops with this stunner. Beneath the gloss and black paint, you've got a laminate spruce soundboard, CNC'd into the same

cutaway dreadnought shape as the CSE44, bound to the same mid-depth US-made bowl with ivoroid and braced with a modified X. We're not saying it's the first thing you'd grab on a trolley-dash through Guitar Center, but first-timer buyers bracing themselves for a shitbox should be pleasantly surprised.

Forget the displaced soundholes. The CC24 offers one standard hole in the centre, finished with an inlaid abalone rosette and met by a bound rosewood board with tidy abalone dots. The three-piece nato neck is elegantly secured to the Lyrachord body, while Ovation's traditional gloss black headstock is completed with staggered gold tuners. Finally, if you gouged out the walnut bridge with a rusty screwdriver, you'd find Ovation's CP100 picking up the string

vibrations. It's controlled by the compact OP4BT preamp on the waist of the body.

Aside from a few smudges on the binding, the CC24's level of build is just as tidy as what we've seen come off Ovation's Korean production line. The quality has filtered down the line, as it always does with the world's best luthiers.

It feels pretty good too. The Lyrachord bowl slips around your lap a bit, but this is made up for by a V-shaped neck profile that ensures your palm gets the perfect grip while giving your fingers maximum purchase to claw out the riffs. More experienced players might argue that the CC24 provides a slightly generic playing experience. We'd argue this makes perfect sense for its market: younger players who are still exploring where their preferences lie and can't afford to keep swapping guitars during the set.

The raw tone of the CC24 tends towards the jangler end of the spectrum, which made it a real treat when TG pushed a plectrum across its strings, and only slightly less convincing when we thumbed bass notes on the low strings. Things get better when you plug in. It doesn't look particularly adaptable, but the OP4BT offers control over bass, mid and treble, so you can transform your sound from the crisp snap of a country solo to the mellow glide of an Evan Dando tune, for example. We didn't experience any problems with feedback either (another benefit of the bowlback format). The only high-pitched squeals should come from the ladies on the security rail.

**FOR:** Amazing value, solid performance

**AGAINST:** Some features are a bit pedestrian

**TG RATING:**



### WHO'S IT FOR?

Guitarists looking for their first great electro-acoustic guitar...

### INFORMATION

**ORIGIN:** China  
**BODY:** US-made mid-depth Lyrachord bowl  
**TOP:** Laminated spruce  
**NECK:** Three-piece nato with two-way truss rod  
**FINGERBOARD:** Bound rosewood, with abalone dot inlays  
**FRETS:** 20  
**SCALE:** 25"  
**PICKUPS:** Ovation CP100 piezo and OP4BT preamp  
**CONTROLS:** 3-band EQ and gain control  
**HARDWARE:** Walnut bridge and gold Ovation tuners  
**FINISH:** Black [pictured], Natural, Red Rubyburst, Transparent Blue  
**CASE:** No  
**LEFT-HANDERS:** No  
**CONTACT:** John Hornby Skewes  
**WEB:** www.jhs.co.uk

