

OVATION IDEA \$449
ELECTRO-ACOUSTICS



PHOTOGRAPHY BY ANDY SHORT



Ovation iDea £449

An Ovation fitted with an mp3 player loaded with backing tracks and tutorials. The acoustic world may never be the same again... *by Steve Harvey*

For the more technically able, inquisitive and well-heeled acoustic guitarist, there's a plethora of digital equipment available to augment your playing experience. Be it standalone recorders, amps with inputs to facilitate play-along CDs and tutorials or computer software designed to create a studio environment onscreen, the list of bolt-ons is limited only by budget. But what about having the tools to record, play back, download and play-along all squeezed into a tidy package and preloaded into a stylish acoustic? Now that would be a great idea. Enter the Ovation iDea.

Launched late in 2008, the iDea is the first and, to our knowledge, only acoustic guitar on the market that offers a built-in mp3 recorder/player. In its simplest form, the iDea is essentially an acoustic with an installed hard-drive, but when coupled to the digital recorder, which is installed within the onboard preamp, the patented technology opens up a whole host of features and possibilities not previously available on a guitar – acoustic or electric.

Before we get to the techy stuff and its functionality, a word or two about the guitar itself. Digitals aside, the iDea is a visually stunning example and, without exception,

everyone that's passed it during its time in the test suite has commented on its looks. The iDea is unmistakably an Ovation, but its ultra-modern styling sets it apart from anything else in the range. The customary multi-soundhole epaulette has been replaced with three stylish elliptical shaped wave soundports, as previously seen on the Ovation MOB47. The spruce top has been finished in a space-age satin platinum.

Ovation's semi-parabolic shaped, Lyrachord back has been in production in various forms since the late sixties, and regular readers will be familiar with its design concept and tonal properties. For some, the bowl-shaped back makes playing without a strap in the seated position a skill to master as the guitar tends to slide down your leg, but overall the Ovation is comfortable to play.

The Ovation neck is home to 22 frets in total: 17 full-width and five frets descending in size to follow the shaped fretboard end. A sweeping Venetian cutaway allows for plenty of access to the upper registers. The Eastern mahogany 'medium-V' profile neck has been gloss finished to match the top. The satin platinum colour scheme continues right up to the underside of the headstock,

and black-plated Ovation tuners complement the high-gloss black headstock face.

The iDea's finish and presentation is very good. The joints are all clean and tidy and the guitar feels well built and sturdy. Unscrewing the circular inspection plate to the rear of the guitar provides plenty of access to the guitar's innards and web of cables.

Functions

Considering the multitude of functions onboard, the iDea's dashboard is easy to navigate. Four centre-indented sliders control volume and the three-band EQ, while a mini joystick takes care of the navigation duties. Three small buttons (play/stop, repeat and record) sit beneath the display screen.

As with all of Ovation's OP series preamps, a release button unhitches the unit to access the nine-volt battery.

Ovation has cleverly crammed the iDea's technology into a unit which has exactly the same dimensions as the OP series preamps (see spec check), meaning that if you're an owner of an Ovation with one of the aforementioned preamps fitted, you can purchase an iDea preamp separately for a fairly simple retro fit.

The Rivals

To our knowledge, there's nothing like the Ovation iDea. **Fishman's Aura** range augment the natural sound of an acoustic by blending digital sound images with the source guitar's output. The **Ellipse Aura** (£359) is a retro fit preamp. **Martin** and **Roland** have come together to produce the AP-1 pickup, which comes in three Martin models (00C-16DBGTE, DC-16OGTE and OMC-16OGTE – all £1,799).



The simple and easy-to-use menu for the iDea technology



The space-age platinum finish gives the iDea a suitably futuristic look

Anything recorded on the iDea can quickly be dropped onto your computer fuss-free

Plugging in either a standard instrument cable or supplied stereo headphones brings the analogue phase of the preamp to life, just as it would with any other electro, so if you leave the cable plugged in overnight you'll wake up to a dead battery. But once plugged in, holding the play/stop control for two seconds fires up the digital functions and the fun begins. Having tuned up using the onboard, easy-to-use tuner, we head to the main menu. Using the mini joystick, we navigate to the two principle functions – play or record.

In the play menu there are various mp3 tracks preloaded by Ovation, which are fun to jam to. When playing along, both the guitar and the mp3 signal are channelled down the single instrument cable and outputted by your amp. Adjusting the levels is done using the volume slider on the preamp, which affects the guitar's level. A clever feature of the play mode is that the tempo of the mp3 tracks can be slowed down to help with note-for-note solo learning.

In the record menu we can choose between guitar/mic and guitar/aux configurations. When in guitar/mic mode, the iDea works as a digital notebook. Imagine the scenario: you're happily noodling away and suddenly you stumble across a really tasty riff or chord progression that's too good to ignore. No need at this point to search for

a suitable recording device, rather you simply call up guitar/mic mode and play the piece again. Because the integral condenser mic is also recording, you can sing melody line ideas or even leave yourself instructions. Of course, the guitar/mic feature is also perfect for recording completed songs too. Because the iDea connects with a PC or Mac with a standard USB cable, anything recorded on the iDea can quickly be dropped onto your computer fuss-free. Files are in mp3 format so they can be added to your music library. Whatever your default mp3 player is will recognise the files for unlimited play-back. You can even burn a collection of the recordings on to a disc.

To ensure that iDea owners don't get bored with the pre-loaded onboard lessons and jam tracks, Ovation has launched a brand new website (www.ovationidea.com) bung tight with more lessons, jamming material and backing tracks. These can all be downloaded free of charge to the iDea via the USB port.

Lastly, in terms of its functionality, the iDea's back has a 3.2mm stereo input jack. This allows for a stereo (or mono) source to be connected to the guitar. When in guitar/aux mode, you can record backing tracks or play-along material using any line-level player or mixer straight onto the guitar's memory. Any such material will then appear on

the menu in play mode and can then be slowed down for ease of learning.

In many ways, we've only covered the basics here. For those with enough creativity and knowledge, there's an array of uses for the iDea. For example, if your car's stereo head-unit has an aux in jack, with the right cable running from the iDea's headphone port you can even listen to your recordings in the car!

Sounds

Ovation acoustics have a distinct tone and the iDea is no exception. In pure acoustic mode, the iDea has a bright, snappy, punchy zing and, although it's certainly not the warmest acoustic you'll ever play, the iDea performs well. Chords are balanced and full, while lead runs are clear and have a good amount of sustain.

In digital mode, we are impressed with the quality of the recordings. The microphone performs well and although not studio quality, the mp3 recordings are good enough for a useable demo.

Verdict

When Ovation first started making guitars in the mid sixties, recording studios occupied entire buildings. Now it seems Ovation has built an entire recording studio into one of its guitars. Make no mistake, this is a real leap forward for the acoustic guitar. Yes, it may be that in the future we will look back to 2009 and reflect on how far onboard technology has come since the iDea, but it will be with great fondness we'll reminisce about the first time mp3 technology came built in to an acoustic. Ovation's great iDea brings the world of acoustic guitars into the digital age. This reviewer is reaching for a credit card...

Bottom Line

We like: Concept, execution... everything!

We dislike: Nothing

Guitarist says: A forward thinking guitar for the digital age that enables you to capture ideas, practise and a lot more besides



Ovation iDea

PRICE: £449

ORIGIN: China

TYPE: Mid-depth cutaway

TOP: Spruce

BACK/SIDES: Lyrachord

MAX RIM DEPTH: Semi-parabolic shaped bowl

MAX BODY WIDTH: 401mm

NECK: Eastern mahogany

SCALE LENGTH: 635mm (25-inch)

TUNERS: Black Ovation

NUT/WIDTH: Synthetic/42mm

FINGERBOARD: Rosewood

FRETS: 17 full-width plus five decreasing

BRIDGE/SPACING:

Rosewood/54.5mm

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 2.25/4.96

OPTIONS: Ovation OPi-1 Preamp (£199) available separately for retrofit to replace OP-10, OP-11, OP-12, OP-30, OP-40, OP-50, OP-Pro, OP-Pro/Studio or VIP-5 preamp. OPi-1 package includes three pre-loaded lessons/backing tracks, ear buds, mounting hardware, auxiliary input jack with connection cable, USB cable, installation instructions and Quick Start Guide

LEFT-HANDERS: No

FINISH: Satin platinum (as reviewed)

Fender GBI

01342 331700

www.ovationguitars.com

Test results

Build quality ★★★★★
Playability ★★★★★
Sound ★★★★★
Value for money ★★★★★

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★