

DANELECTRO '59 DANO & DANO PRO \$199 EACH
ELECTRICS



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Danelectro '59 Dano & Dano Pro £199 each

Great value and cool as you like, but can these quirky retro twang-machines do the business in 2007?

by *Chris Vinnicombe*

Back in issue 264, we celebrated the return of Danelectro guitars after a production hiatus that lasted nearly four years. Since then, new versions of the company's '56 Pro and Longhorn models have provided plenty of the originals' quirks and charm with sensible concessions to reliability in the shape of upgrades such as an intonatable bridge. That said, with

the Longhorns creeping over the £400 mark there were some dissenting voices questioning their value.

Happily, then, Danelectro's latest reissues are both the least expensive since the brand's return and easily the coolest. The '59 Dano is based on the model made famous by a certain Mr James Page, albeit in a single-pickup configuration, while the Dano Pro is the first ever

reissue of the sixties Pro model with its weird offset shape that largely throws any notions of ergonomics out of the window. And, following in the wake of brands such as Vintage bringing 'aged' instruments into the lower reaches of the market, both models feature some light cosmetic distress for that worn-in look.

Contrasting cream scratchplates and side panels look like they have

been given the teabag treatment to simulate the effects of years of gigging in smoky clubs – ironically no longer a concern since the smoking ban came into force, unless you perform most of your gigs in speakeasies or the bar in the House Of Commons. Meanwhile, the instruments' chrome hardware components are 'treated' to a worn look, presumably with some sort of wire brush. The Fender Custom Shop possibly won't be losing sleep over the quality of the work, but we think it looks rather fetching, and these are guitars that are all about fun, after all.

In many ways, the '59 and Pro are the same guitar: common features include the Masonite – hardboard to you and I – top and back sections attached to a plywood frame that make for lightweight, semi-hollow construction. Maple, bolt-on necks provide a little more conventionality, while the

The Rivals

Danelectro '59 Dano & Dano Pro

Fender's Classic Series '65 Mustang Reissue (£699.99) is considerably more expensive than the Danelectro offerings here, but its twin single-coils and short scale are just the ticket for wiry retro twang. Eastwoodguitars.com is the place to go for all kinds of sixties catalogue chic, and the **Airline Town & Country Deluxe Reissue** (£399) is an update on one of Jack White's main Raconteurs instruments. **Vintage's VR100CR** (£189) is a Wilkinson P-90-loaded take on Gibson's iconic 'student' electric, the Les Paul Junior.



The first reissue '59 DC had a rudimentary bridge with a wooden saddle. Thankfully the '59 Dano updates things in that respect



electronic configuration is identical to the '56 Pro we reviewed in issue 264: twin Alnico lipstick single-coils with a master volume, master tone and three-way toggle pickup selector. The middle setting on three-way switch gives you both pickups in series, so you get a hotter, meatier combination than the more hollow, jangly parallel combination of standard Fender Telecaster wiring, for example.

JHS won't be importing the full range of candy-shop finishes in which the Pro is available Stateside, but there's still plenty of choice. The 'Danelectro' sticker will peel off if you don't like it.

We can't imagine the '59 looking any better in any other finish than the classic black; the guitar's top, back and neck have a silky feel somewhere between gloss and matte that will appeal to those who find hi-gloss just a little cheap and nasty, and too slippery to the touch.

While there are numerous similarities, you are probably thinking that a pretty big one is that the Pro doesn't seem to have as many frets! And you'd be right. Although the deep bridge position may trick you into thinking that the Pro has a shorter scale length than the '59, it actually doesn't, but there are two less medium-sized frets.

That said, 19 is one more than some of the vintage Pros were equipped with. Notwithstanding, with a 13th fret neck-body join we doubt anyone is going to miss that extra bit of fingerboard, and besides, neither guitar particularly screams high register histrionics as far as we are concerned.

In terms of construction, neither instrument is quite in PRS territory (although they share the same 25-inch scale length) – witness the single screw and hardboard disc 'system' that gives you access to the electrical innards – but at £199 it's difficult to fault them. There are no finger-slashing

ETERNAL DANO NATION

The big names that made the affordable immortal

While lists of devotees of instruments like the Fender Stratocaster and Gibson Les Paul read like a Who's Who of rock 'n' roll, it may surprise you to note that some of rock's biggest heavyweights have embraced the cheap and cheerful charm of Danelectro guitars over the years as well.

Jimi Hendrix and Jerry Garcia were two guitarists whose first forays into six-string sci-fi were undertaken with a Dano in hand. If you want to hear a Danelectro in action on record then, sickly sixties atrocities like Sugar, Sugar by The Archies aside, there are plenty of more credible examples including The Sound Of Silence by Simon & Garfunkel.

In 1965, Pete Townshend could be seen subjecting a Danelectro Guitarlin to plenty of onstage abuse, while just a few years later Slowhand himself would give his own twin-pickup standard a psychedelic paint job for use in Blind Faith.

Jimmy Page's Danelectro affiliation began when he was Little Jim the sessioneer, and he would later rediscover the charms of a '59 – made from the best parts of two separate instruments bolted together – for the recording sessions that would yield Led Zeppelin's Physical Graffiti album in 1975. The composite '59 would also serve him well onstage for Kashmir, Babe I'm Gonna Leave You and Black Mountain Side.

Danelectro guitars: for those rare occasions when a 1959 sunburst Les Paul just doesn't quite hit the spot...

Add a little valve echo or slapback and it's surprising how fresh and exciting this type of old-school twang can sound



Like the rest of the hardware, the chrome sealed tuners come already looking worn in



The Alnico single-coils are capable of a surprisingly modern twang

exposed fret ends to worry about, and strummed acoustically both guitars have a lively resonance and no small amount of volume thanks to the semi-hollow construction. Of the two, in terms of unamplified playing experience, something about the Pro just edges the '59 in the brash, strummability stakes.

SOUNDS

Plugged into a small valve combo with just a hint of crunch dialled in our first thoughts are that it's easy to forget just how satisfying Danelectro guitars can be. With the kind of biting treble that really evokes the edge-of-the-seat bawl of early rock 'n' roll, add a little valve echo or slapback delay and it's surprising how fresh and exciting this type of old-school twang can sound – just listen to the likes of The Coral or Arctic Monkeys for modern reference points. Indeed, the addition of a grainy analogue delay easily gets you into eerie B movie soundtrack territory: an innocent trip to the rock 'n' roll circus takes a dark turn as the clown's make-up runs, turning his smile into a ghoulish frown...

Such strangeness aside, there are obvious sonic shortcomings in certain genres, but we'd wager that not many players are going to turn to a Danelectro for bowel-churning metal or smooth rock. However, if it's Jack White or Jon Spencer dirty fuzzbox blues you are after, it's here in spades alongside Beatles-in-Hamburg rock 'n' raunch, garage punk venom and eighties indie jangle. The slightly different pickup positions on both instruments – the Pro's pair of lipsticks being further towards its neck – mean there's a little more treble on offer from the '59, but there's not a lot in it, and both guitars benefit from that series-

linked middle position that adds real punch to the equation.

VERDICT

For all the boutique exotica that we are fortunate enough to get to grips with here at Guitarist, it's interesting that a couple of idiosyncratic £199 plywood and hardboard concoctions such as these caused such a stir in the office this month. As the Pro and the '59 are very similar instruments, which one to buy is largely an aesthetic decision based on whether you prefer the iconic symmetry of the '59 or the somewhat lumpy offset outline of the Pro. For us, it's the '59 every time: the coolest £199 guitar in the world? Almost certainly.

The bottom line

Danelectro Dano '59

We like: All the charm of the original with better hardware; a really useable range of sounds that are surprisingly 'now'; so much fun to play
We dislike: At this price, virtually nothing!
Guitarist says: Unbelievable vibe and character complete with modern reliability. We'll take one in every colour please!

Danelectro Dano Pro

We like: Ditto the '59
We dislike: Some will be put off by the body shape and consequential lack of upper-fret access
Guitarist says: The look will split opinion but the sound and vibe exceed expectation.



Danelectro '59 Dano

PRICE: £199
ORIGIN: Korea
TYPE: Double cutaway electric
BODY: Masonite, plywood frame semi-hollow
NECK: Maple, bolt-on
SCALE LENGTH: 635 mm (25-inch)
NUT/WIDTH: Aluminium/42mm
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood
FRETS: 21, medium
HARDWARE: Worn chrome sealed tuners, hardtail bridge with adjustable saddles
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 55mm
ELECTRICS: Twin Alnico lipstick pickups, three-way toggle, master volume and tone controls
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 2.75/6.0
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISHES: Black (as reviewed), burgundy, keen green
JHS 01132 865381
www.danelectro.com

Test results

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



Danelectro Dano Pro

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STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 55mm
ELECTRICS: Twin Alnico lipstick pickups, three-way toggle, master volume and tone controls
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 2.75/6.0
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISHES: Aqua (as reviewed), peach, burgundy, blue, tan, black

Test results

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