

DANELECTRO '56 SINGLE CUT SERIES £349-£369  
ELECTRICS



PHOTOGRAPHY BY SIMON LEES



# Danelectro '56 Single Cutaway series

£369, £369 & £349

As Danelectro streamlines its model range, it has unveiled a third and best reissue of its iconic 1956 U2 guitar... and a bass to boot **by Ed Mitchell**

**T**hese freshly tweaked '56 series Danelectro guitars mark the third reissue of Nathan Daniel's original 1956 U2 model. While the first reissue, launched back in 1998, closely followed the specs and aesthetics of the original guitar ('Coke bottle' headstock, rosewood bridge saddle, vinyl body tape and the like), the 2006 56 Pro was what might be described as 'pimped'. The Coke bottle headstock had a notch cut into it (a diet version if you will), the bridge came loaded with individual saddles to allow better intonation and the classic white vinyl body tape had gone. The 56 Pro was a great guitar, but losing the quirky features did dent its vintage vibe a bit.

Fast-forward to the new '56 Series and the unintonatable rosewood bridge and body tape – in old spec 'Ostrich Pattern' no less – are back where they belong. There's also some curious stuff going on at the headstock end of some of these new models, and there's even a matching bass version.

The launch of these new models coincides with a streamlining of the Danelectro guitar and bass range. Now, only the new single-cutaway '56

models, the existing double-cutaway '59 guitars and the 'Dead On 58' Longhorn bass will be available. 'The Wild Thing', an eye-popping reissue of a one-off prototype swept wing guitar uncovered a few years ago is also due to hit these shores later this year. But that's your lot, Dano-wise.

## '56 With Humbucker

The first thing you'll notice about this '56 model is the non-vintage humbucker at the bridge. This isn't the first time that Danelectro has flirted with a double-Lipstick tube humbucker; the short-lived Hodad and Mod (six- and seven-string) guitars that hung around between 1998-2001 had humbuckers onboard. That those guitars didn't take off quite as Danelectro would have hoped is possibly down to the fact that they weren't based on original fifties or sixties models (although they've since gained something of a cult status). The new '56 addresses that issue by mounting the humbucker in the bridge position of a classic U2-style model.

In true classic Dano style, the '56 has a pair of concentric volume and tone controls. The

larger disc on the bottom is the volume control; the little knob on the top is the tone. Many players initially get the two parts of the control mixed up, but you'll get used to it after a few goes – we did. The control set-up is just one of those quirks that makes a Dano what it is. Ditto the chunky three-way selector switch that looks like it came from the dashboard of an old Russian tank.

Like all Danos, the '56's body is formed from a Masonite (aka hardboard) top and back mounted on a plywood frame. It's semi-hollow, but still comes in at around six-and-a-half pounds. Hardly a spine bender, then, but it's still substantial enough that you know you have something hanging around your shoulders.

Playability of these new Dano '56 models is first class. The 'U'-profile neck has a bit of beef about it, but shouldn't present anyone with any problems. The

## The Rivals

'56 with humbucker

For some vintage-style quirks with humbucker firepower take a look at the **Italia Maranello**. At £489, it's a bit more expensive than the '56 but, hey, someone has to pay for all that pearloid...



The dual-Lipstick humbucker adds some extra power to proceedings





## The Rivals

### '56 Single Cutaway

If you're looking for playable eye candy, check out the **Eastwood Airline Tuxedo** (£679). This replica of a mid-fifties Barney Kessel guitar is loaded with a pair of P-90s. The company's Roy Smeck-style **RS-11** guitar (£549) is also pleasing to the eyeballs.

14-inch fingerboard radius and perfectly profiled and seated medium frets make it probably the best playing Danelectro yet.

Aside from the humbucker, the other big departure from the original U2 model is the 'Dolphin Nose' headstock. Now, fifties Danelectro-branded guitars didn't come with this headstock; they rocked the aforementioned Coke bottle job. The Dolphin Nose was featured on Silvertone branded guitars, also made by

Danelectro in the fifties. Obviously, Danelectro hasn't muddled its spec lists and this unusual looking headstock has been added on, er, porpoise. If you want the humbucker-equipped '56 then this is the headstock you're going to get. We like it, but if it doesn't do it for you then the single-coil-equipped '56 models have the Coke bottle headstock. Well, with one notable exception...

### '56 Single Cutaway

The new white Dano with gold hardware is pretty... weird. Gold bits on a Danelectro hint at a mutton/lamb situation, in that bling on a rudimentary guitar seems out of place. You soon warm to it and (whisper this) it actually looks pretty good. The most striking part is the oversized headstock. This headstock type is known as the 'Full Bell' and featured on some Dano models from 1954 to 1956. The headstock face is adorned with a vintage Dano logo and a pair of gold scrolls. The gold detailing is also

picked up by the hardware and the pinstripe plus Dano 'D' on the scratchplate.

Like the other '56 guitar, this has a bolt-on neck held in position by five screws. Pickup height is adjusted from the rear and the hardtail bridge has a rosewood saddle. True to vintage spec, intonation is fixed.

Moving on, the guitar's neck overhangs the body at the cutaway, which provides great access to the upper frets. You really have to try the guitar for yourself to see how this works. It's another simple idea that enhances the guitar's performance. We like the fact that Danelectro hasn't let the side down and fitted an ultra-light gauge of strings – these guitars need a fat set to bring out the tone and help with tuning stability.

### '56 Bass

The new '56 series bass comes with the Silvertone Dolphin Nose headstock. In lieu of the concentric controls on the six-strings, the bass has a dedicated



Gold hardware on a Danelectro seems incongruous – rudimentary luxury?

The great tonal secret with Dano guitars is the middle position... a stonking slab of musical beef



The Single Cutaway's oversized headstock sets it apart from the other '56 guitars



The hardware on the bass is brushed nickel, just like the '56 with humbucker

volume control for each Lipstick pickup and a master tone. The knobs look like vintage radio jobs and are based on original spec items from back in the day.

The '56 bass has a 30-inch short scale length (a Precision Bass is 34 inches) making it manageable for just about anybody. The 24 medium frets are perfectly executed and the action and chunky but comfortable neck profile make it a joy to play. Again, you can't intonate the bridge on this bass.

The vintage-style enclosed tuners have the same white plastic buttons as the guitars. Most bassists prefer to see something a bit more substantial poking out the side of a headstock, but we think that big tuners would look pretty daft on such a slim headstock. The '56 bass is further tied in with the aesthetic of the guitars in the range with the Ostrich Pattern body tape and the classic Dano aluminium top nut. Like the '56 humbucker model, the hardware

on the '59 Bass is a cool satin-finished nickel.

### Sounds

Starting with the two guitars it should come as no surprise that the humbucker-equipped '56 is louder in the bridge position than its single-coil-packing counterpart. The great tonal secret with Dano guitars is the middle position on the toggle switch. The pickups are wired in series (not parallel like the majority of dual-pickup guitars) and selecting both units unleashes a stonking slab of musical beef. On the single-coil guitars, the leap in volume between the bridge and middle (both pickups on) positions is striking. We guarantee that you'll spend a lot of time in that centre position, it's seriously addictive. The difference between the levels of the bridge and middle positions is much less apparent on the humbucker-equipped '56, but it's there.

The bridge Lipstick single-coil on a Dano sounds a bit like a fat Strat unit. You get bags of jangle and it's bright without ever tipping over into shrill. The humbucker on the new '56 manages to retain that sparkle while giving your amp more of a push than the regular model. The neck single-coils on both guitars are warm yet still bright thanks to the fact that they sit closer to the bridge than you would expect to find on other types of guitars.

Aside from the various strains of heavy metal, these Danos can fit into just about any genre of music. Pop, indie, rock 'n' roll, rockabilly, garage rock, punk... anyone who needs a guitar that cuts through a mix and looks good doing it should try a Dano. Running through our Retroman Lola fuzz box we bagged classic

### The Rivals

#### '56 Bass

At £549, the **Italia Rimini** has plenty of retro appeal and a pair of mini humbuckers. Taking the vintage thrill in another direction, you could consider a classic violin bass, and where better to start than with **Höfner's** own affordable **Contemporary** editions. Shop around and expect to pay around £400.

Link Wray tones and those of sixties garage bands such as The Seeds and Count Five. Danos also make great slide guitars.

The '56 bass is more versatile than you'd imagine. Turn up the neck pickup's volume, turn the bridge unit down, and reduce the tone, and you'll get a perfect sixties soul and R&B rumble. If we owned this bass, we'd add to the vintage depth by fitting a set of flatwound strings.

If you select the bridge pickup solo, turn the tone back up and attack the strings with a heavy pick there's a very cool Jam-era Bruce Foxton tone in there. Add some overdrive for some Ox-style chunk. Incidentally, any concerns you may have about the lack of intonation adjustment on a Dano will vanish when you plug this bass in.

### Verdict

The interesting thing about Danelectro guitars is that they can hold their head high in any guitar collection. It doesn't matter if you have a wall full of Fender or Gibson Custom Shop editions, or Paul Reed Smith's finest work, you'll still get a kick out of a Dano. And obviously the fact that over the years



they've been used by Jimmy Page, Clapton, Billy Gibbons et al doesn't hurt either.

The bottom line is that these new Danos are not a budget version of something (Jerry Jones' high-end repros aside). They sound and play great because they hold true to Nathan Daniel's original vision. They're affordable because they're made from inexpensive materials and built, very well, in China. They also make a sound like no other guitar. The addition of period details such as the resurrected headstock designs, and more modern hardware updates such as humbucking pickups, adds to the desirability of these latest models. The superb playability and the tone from those beefed-up Alnico pickups is the icing on the cake. Figure in the price and we reckon it's worth adding some Lipstick to your tonal makeup. 🎸

The Bottom Line

Danelectro '56 Single Cutaway With Humbucker

**We like:** Playability; tone; added bridge firepower  
**We dislike:** We can't fault it  
**Guitarist says:** Pimping the existing '56 design works beautifully, and we like that the humbucker doesn't kill the famous Dano tone

Danelectro '56 Single Cutaway

**We like:** Pretty; great tones; playability  
**We dislike:** Some may not dig the bling factor  
**Guitarist says:** It's serious eye candy, but the '56 has all the tonal beauty of a classic U2 too

Danelectro '56 Single Cutaway Bass

**We like:** Great looks; playability; tone – the whole package  
**We dislike:** Won't make the slappers happy...  
**Guitarist says:** We'd fit a set of flatwound strings to boost the old-school vibe into the stratosphere



Danelectro '56 Single Cutaway With Humbucker

**PRICE:** £369  
**ORIGIN:** China  
**BODY:** Masonite top and back, laminated wood frame, semi-hollow  
**NECK:** Maple, bolt-on  
**SCALE LENGTH:** 635mm (25 inches)  
**NUT/WIDTH:** Aluminium/40.83mm  
**FINGERBOARD:** Rosewood with dot inlays, 356mm (14-inch) radius  
**FRETS:** 21, medium  
**HARDWARE:** Satin nickel hardtail bridge with a rosewood saddle, vintage-style enclosed tuners with white plastic buttons  
**STRING SPACING, BRIDGE:** 55mm  
**ELECTRICS:** Twin-Lipstick bridge humbucker and neck single-coil; three-way toggle pickup selector switch, two concentric volume and tone controls  
**WEIGHT (kg/lb):** 2.9/6.5  
**OPTIONS:** None  
**RANGE OPTIONS:** None  
**FINISHES:** Red (as reviewed), black and aqua  
**John Hornby Skewes**  
**01132 865381**  
**www.danelectro.com**

Test results

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

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★



Danelectro '56 Single Cutaway

**PRICE:** £369  
**ORIGIN:** China  
**BODY:** Masonite top and back, laminated wood frame, semi-hollow  
**NECK:** Maple, bolt-on  
**SCALE LENGTH:** 635mm (25 inches)  
**NUT/WIDTH:** Aluminium/40.83mm  
**FINGERBOARD:** Rosewood with dot inlays, 356mm (14-inch) radius  
**FRETS:** 21, medium  
**HARDWARE:** Gold hardtail bridge with a rosewood saddle, vintage-style enclosed tuners  
**STRING SPACING, BRIDGE:** 55mm  
**ELECTRICS:** Two Lipstick single-coil pickups, three-way toggle pickup selector switch, two concentric volume and tone controls  
**WEIGHT (kg/lbs):** 2.9/6.5  
**OPTIONS:** None  
**RANGE OPTIONS:** Dano '56 (£369) in a black and red crackle finish with black hardware and 'Coke bottle' headstock; Dano '56 (£369) in black with satin nickel hardware and 'Coke bottle' headstock  
**FINISHES:** White (as reviewed)

Test results

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

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★



Danelectro '56 Single Cutaway Bass

**PRICE:** £349  
**ORIGIN:** China  
**BODY:** Masonite top and back, laminated wood frame, semi-hollow  
**NECK:** Maple, bolt-on  
**SCALE LENGTH:** 754mm (30 inches)  
**NUT/WIDTH:** Aluminium/45mm  
**FINGERBOARD:** Rosewood with dot inlays, 356mm (14-inch) radius  
**FRETS:** 24, medium  
**HARDWARE:** Satin nickel hardtail bridge with a rosewood saddle, vintage-style enclosed tuners with white plastic buttons  
**STRING SPACING, BRIDGE:** 50mm  
**ELECTRICS:** Two Lipstick single-coil pickups, two volume controls and a master tone  
**WEIGHT (kg/lbs):** 2.8/6.2  
**OPTIONS:** Dano 'Dead On 58' Longhorn bass (£349) in copperburst  
**RANGE OPTIONS:** None  
**FINISHES:** Aqua (as reviewed), black

Test results

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

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★