

GEAR

ROUND-UP

GUILD WESTERLY COLLECTION



Words: Rob Laing Photography: Jesse Wild

GUILD WESTERLY COLLECTION ROUND-UP

Can Guild's most affordable range yet live up to the American company's reputation? We set our testing phasers to strum and pick up a concert, dreadnought and 12-string to find out...



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TG doesn't want to sound like that old know-it-all everyone avoids down your local, but it has to be said – you young acoustic players have never had it so good! And in truth, we can all benefit from the efforts big boys Martin and Taylor have made towards wooing players on more humble budgets with affordable gig-ready designs. American brand Guild has its own pedigree – the company has been making electric and acoustic guitars for over 60 years now, and so it makes sense that it would want a piece of the action, especially as Guild's story heads into a new chapter. Under Fender ownership since 1995, Guild was bought by nylon-string specialist Cordoba Music Group in 2014. The Westerly Collection is part of this new era. Replacing the GAD series (Guild Acoustic Designs) that revived the company's iconic designs in the early 2000s, the Archback models here represent some of the most affordable options in the range. California designed, Chinese made; tops are solid, sides laminated with a subtly bowled back design that, in addition to lighter weight due to not needing the added support of back braces, Guild claims to allow for 'great volume and projection, long sustain, and a lush, full sound.' Sounds inviting, doesn't it?

Guild has been making guitars for over 60 years now



GUILD M240-E £359

Plucky performance from a diminutive body

THE smaller-bodied acoustic has seen a resurgence in recent years, and when we sit down with this concert shape, there's an instant intimacy to the playing experience due to the body's closeness to your own. This kind of experience shouldn't be overlooked because for some it will provide the vital connection that will make them reconsider their default taste for the larger dreadnoughts and keep them coming back for just one more strum. The M240 certainly has that effect on us.

The look is clean and classic; the right side of minimal to be timeless with Guild's open-gear tuners bringing a vintage touch. There's no disappointing surprises as we play either – this is a guitar with a midrange punch that's boxy in all the right ways and a real flatpicking bluegrassers delight. Fingerpicked notes are defined with a sustain that suggests the Archback

design really does make a difference. The medium action here certainly doesn't get in the way of that, and in truth we'd prefer a lower action out of the box but it does encourage us to tune down for some DADGAD.

In all the excitement of playing it's easy to forget this is also an electro. The M240-E doesn't exactly scream out the 'E' part of its name. And that's a good thing because the subtle controls inside the soundhole for Guild's own AP-1 piezo system don't get in the way of the guitar's acoustic aesthetic. Powered by an active nine-volt battery, the bass and volume controls are simple but player-friendly, and you'll really want that bass to retain the low end presence to balance this model's sound. Though we find this guitar's AP1 ends up providing us with the most typical piezo 'quack' of the three, dialling some judicious EQ at the desk or preamp pedal can help address this.





GUILD D-240E £359

A solid (topped) and dependable dread'

THE Concert model's Westerly sibling is a good ol' dreadnought. And there's a reason why it's the most popular acoustic shape, it usually yields an all round performance that will suite most needs. And true to form we find that lower end warmth that the M-240E doesn't have to spare is present and correct here.

Feature-wise it's the same recipe as the smaller guitar. A classic Sitka Spruce look in matte but with that Guild headstock better proportioned here to the larger dreadnought body shape. Like its smaller sibling, those Guild open gear tuners are stable when we try a few alternate tunings. It's a balanced guitar in sound, as a good dreadnought should be, though in terms of projection it doesn't sound like the subtle looking Archback design makes as much audible difference compared to the more diminutive M240. It turns in a fine performance though, notably warm for

a spruce-topped guitar, without losing harmonic definition.

First impressions when plugging in are mixed. We find the AP-1's nine-volt battery in its pouch sliding around inside the body; they've become separated from the Velcro fixture near the base of the neck. It's easily remedied, though not without taking the strings off first, but it might be something to keep an eye on to prevent potential damage.

The AP-1 looks to be styled after Fishman's Sonitone system (found on the higher end Westerly electros) though we note that on all three of these guitars, the signal cuts in and out as we adjust volume. More surprising still is our test D240 yields around 50 per cent less plugged in output than the concert model (we even change the battery to make sure). But there is a payoff; there's less plasticky piezo quack here and an electro performance that's more organic compared to the M240.

GUILD F2512-E MAPLE £439

Is a splurge on a 12-string finally justified?

IT'S said that everyone should play a 12-string at least once – there's pedals and Nashville tuning that will kind of get you in the ballpark but nothing rivals the real deal, and the glorious harmonic chime it brings. And of course, *Hotel California's* intro is the mother of 12-string songs, so obviously it's the first thing we play. With that out the way, it's time to take stock. Because Guild is a brand that has a reputation for jumbo 12-strings, but this is its most affordable yet; expectation weighs heavy. It's certainly a looker – the maple is clean and eye-catching. Newcomers to 12s will be a little bewildered at first by the string spacing when they pick this up, and it'll take some time but it's pretty straightforward to tune in principle; the third to sixth strings are each paired by one an octave higher but just need to be tuned as you normally would (two Es, two As, and so on). Yes, it takes twice

as long but you're rewarded with a lush shimmering phasing sound that's full of resonance. Arpeggios are a real treat here, with a rich tonality that's well-balanced across the spectrum.

Plugging in reveals the F2512-E to have the most resonant top for percussive playing (indeed John Butler utilises a 12-string guitar with the G strings removed for his signature instrumental track, *Ocean*) and the chorus-like nature of the tone does seem to work pretty well with the AP-1 piezo here without sounding harsh.

Of course, this is a niche instrument that isn't going to be an everyday guitar for most people, but the price means that it could finally tip the balance for those who've always wanted a 12-string for their home studio, or have a few songs live that would really come alive with one. Not to mention that Eagles cover version... >>>



VERDICT

ALL THREE of these guitars turn in an impressive experience for the price point; their high quality and well-padded gigbags contribute to that, too. The M240-E's versatility stands out; we can envision it being a go-to guitar in the home that has enough midrange clout to hold its own on stage in a band mix.

But if you want to finally get that 12-string without too much compromise on quality, or a dependable dread that's ideal as a first acoustic, with a more future-proof electro element for the open-mic stage should you make it there, Guild is making a strong statement in reaching out to new players of all kinds.

GUILD M240-E £359

AT A GLANCE

TOP: Solid Sitka spruce
BACK & SIDES: Mahogany, mahogany
NECK: Mahogany
SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood
FRETS: 20
ELECTRICS: Guild AP-1 piezo system
HARDWARE: Compensated bone saddle, bone nut, Guild vintage-style open-gear tuners
LEFT-HANDED: N/A
FINISH: Natural
CONTACT: Selectron UK Ltd
 01795 439835
 www.guildguitars.com



SUMMARY	FEATURES				
	SOUND QUALITY				
	VALUE FOR MONEY				
	BUILD QUALITY				
	PLAYABILITY				
	OVERALL RATING				

★★★★★

GUILD D-240E £359

AT A GLANCE

TOP: Solid Sitka spruce
BACK & SIDES: Mahogany
 arched back, mahogany
NECK: mahogany
SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood
FRETS: 20
ELECTRICS: Guild AP-1 piezo system
HARDWARE: Compensated bone saddle, bone nut, Guild vintage-style open-gear tuners
LEFT-HANDED: N/A
FINISH: Natural



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	VALUE FOR MONEY				
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	PLAYABILITY				
	OVERALL RATING				

★★★★★

GUILD F2512-E MAPLE £439

AT A GLANCE

TOP: Solid Sitka spruce
BACK & SIDES: Maple
NECK: Mahogany
SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood
FRETS: 20
ELECTRICS: Guild AP-1 piezo system
HARDWARE: Compensated bone saddle, bone nut, Guild closed-gear tuners
LEFT-HANDED: N/A
FINISH: Natural



SUMMARY	FEATURES				
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	VALUE FOR MONEY				
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	PLAYABILITY				
	OVERALL RATING				

★★★★★