



Yamaha FG700MS, FG720S, FG730S & FGX720SC

£175, £229, £259 & £329

Yamaha introduces its newly updated FG acoustic range. We check out the instruments that you'll be buying in droves this year... by Chris Vinnicombe

PHOTOGRAPHY GAVIN ROBERTS

124 *Guitarist* JUNE 2005



The thin satin finish allows the FG700MS to breathe with a breezy natural resonance that promotes bold chordal work and expansive strumming

For quite some time now, Yamaha's acoustic guitars have been synonymous with great performance and excellent build quality, with a model to suit most wallets. This has paid dividends for the company in the past, and for 2005, the Yamaha FG series has been upgraded with design features inherited from the L-Series, so this quartet has the potential to include some of the company's best entry-level guitars to date. These four instruments range from the FG700MS at £175 to the piezo/preamp-equipped FGX720SC at £329. But let's begin at the first price rung.

FG700MS

The least expensive model here shares many of the features and proportions that are common across the range. The 'M' in the model name denotes a matt finish, although in reality there is a slight sheen that is closer to satin. It's interesting to see Yamaha incorporating this as an option at this level of their acoustic range. The associated tonal benefits of thin finishes have been frequently debated and in recent years many manufacturers have offered this, although often at a premium as a high-end custom feature! On picking up the FG700MS, we were immediately treated to an inviting thin finish that feels organic and tactile. Indeed, the finish sinks into the grain all over the neck, back and sides of the guitar so it is possible to feel the texture of the wood with fingertips. This is something that may polarise players but ultimately it's a subjective issue and a gloss version is available should you wish.

Internal construction appears sound, with a little glue having seeped out from under one of the braces, which is clearly visible through the soundhole on this particular example, although the overall standard is perfectly acceptable at this price point. The neck

joins the headstock via a scarf joint under the first- and sixth-string tuners, rather than at the second fret as some manufacturers opt for, so the length of the rosewood fingerboard is supported by a continuous section of nato. Again in common with all here, tuners are die-cast chrome Grover-a-likes with familiar kidney-shaped buttons. Headstock decoration is genuine mother-of-pearl – a touch of quality at this price. The guitar's serial number is stamped in black ink on the brace that sits under the 20th fret, through which truss rod access is achieved.

Common to all four models, the rosewood bridge is compensated for intonation at the second string and its larger physical size should, in theory, facilitate greater transfer of string vibration to the solid spruce top. The top itself comprises two sections of spruce joined at the centre point, while the simple monochrome rosette design mirrors the purfling, complemented by the dark tortoiseshell scratchplate.

Unlike its cream-bound siblings, the FG700MS features black binding on both the body and the neck, where fretwork is neat and uniform. In terms of overall feel, there is an appealing no-frills accessibility that encourages us to put the instrument through its paces.

SOUNDS: The thin satin finish allows the instrument to breathe with a breezy natural resonance that promotes bold chordal work and expansive strumming. There isn't a sonorous, piano-like bass response but there is a focused bottom end, a pleasant string balance, good sustain and a bold, articulate mid-range.

Fingerpicking is rewarded with definition and sparkle, if lacking a little sweetness and warmth as a result. That said, this is a versatile instrument indeed, and the stripped-down nature of the instrument encourages you to dig



The large rosewood bridge should help the transference of string vibration to the top

YAMAHA FG700MS	TEST RESULTS
Build quality	★★★★★
Playability	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★
<p>■ WE LIKED Resonant, lively performance; great versatility and value</p> <p>■ WE DISLIKED Some players may not be enamoured with the raw feel</p>	

in and play in a way that more ornate acoustics often don't.

FG720S

If you aren't as taken as we were with the FG700MS, then an extra \$54 buys you the FG720S. The specifications are in the main very similar, but there are some notable exceptions. The FG720S features a gloss-finished top, back and sides and an attractive 'dusk sun red' finish, essentially a two-tone red-black burst that has an appealing sixties flavour. If this doesn't happen to float your visual boat, a blue burst and more traditional natural and black models are available as standard.

On picking up the instrument, the feel is quite different from that of the

YAMAHA FG700MS
PRICE: £175
ORIGIN: China
TYPE: Steel-strung dreadnought
TOP: Solid sitka spruce
BACK/SIDES: Nato laminate
MAX BODY DEPTH: 118mm
NECK: Nato
SCALE LENGTH: 650mm
TUNERS: Sealed die-cast chrome
NUT/WIDTH: White synthetic/43mm
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood
FRETS: 20, narrow
BRIDGE/SPACING: Rosewood/53mm
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 1.9/4.6
OPTIONS: The otherwise identical FG700S (£195) has a gloss finish
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISHES: Natural only
Yamaha Kemble
01908 366700
www.yamaha.com

ACOUSTICS/ELECTROS

YAMAHA FG720S

As FG700MS except...

PRICE: £229

OPTIONS: A 12-string version retails at £259

LEFT HANDERS: £259

FINISHES: Dusk sun red (as reviewed), oriental blue burst, natural, black

YAMAHA FG730S

As FG700MS except...

PRICE: £259

BACK/SIDES:

Rosewood laminate

FINISHES: Tobacco brown sunburst (as reviewed), vintage cherry sunburst, natural

The rivals

FG700MS, FG720S & FG730S

Norman B-18 Cedar

£199

Takamine GS330S £239

Adam Black S-8 £279

We got our greasy mitts on the new guitars from Adam Black recently and they proved versatile performers with plenty of visual trimmings.

Norman's B18 impressed last month in both sound and price.

Alternatively, Takamine's G-Series offers superb value and big-name dependability



YAMAHA FG720S	TEST RESULTS
Build quality	★★★★★
Playability	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★
<p>■ WE LIKED Cool finish; tonality imbued with a mellow warmth</p> <p>■ WE DISLIKED Some players prefer their acoustic tones brighter</p>	

YAMAHA FG730S	TEST RESULTS
Build quality	★★★★★
Playability	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★
<p>■ WE LIKED Classic cosmetics; no shortage of top end if you want it</p> <p>■ WE DISLIKED Slightly lightweight tonal performance</p>	



The mother-of-pearl headstock decoration is a quality touch

→ **FG700MS.** This time, the neck has had extra coats of lacquer applied, and as a result we get a thicker, more even satin finish with a smooth, silky sheen. The fingerboard and body binding applied here is cream, although its hue may be a little yellow for some players. The basic platform of the FG720S has been expanded to include lefties, and there is even a 12-string version (see spec check for pricing).

SOUNDS: Perhaps the extra coats of finish tame some of the inherent liveness exhibited by the identically proportioned FG700MS, as the FG720S has a rounder, mellower voice. As part of the trade off, what is lost a little in terms of brightness and presence is gained in warmth and sophistication. While fingerpicked notes don't quite have the same crisp sheen, the guitar's more sedate performance would probably provide a more measured balance for recording rhythmic chords or arpeggiated work with a plectrum, lending extra bite.

FG730S

As we step up a price gear, even more visual sauce is applied to the FG blueprint. This time, the yellowish

cream binding extends to the headstock and the central portion of the rosette is neatly inlaid with abalone. The two-tone tobacco brown sunburst is well applied, most pleasant and lends the guitar a hint of that classic Gibson J45 vibe – as does the vintage cherry sunburst, one of the other finishes available.

The main structural departure can be found in the instrument's back and sides, which are rosewood laminates rather than nato. Indeed, this is the only model in the new FG range to feature rosewood back and sides. The material used has an attractive striped appearance rather similar to what we saw used on the Adam Black instruments in issue 262. The neck is virtually identical in proportion and finish to the FG720S and, such is the consistent nature of Yamaha's Chinese output, we were hard pushed to tell the instruments apart on feel alone.

SOUNDS: Not possessing as much of a strident bottom end as the predominantly nato models, the guitar has a zingier tonality than the FG720S and is even brighter than the FG700MS. However, despite the more expensive guitar's extra accoutrements and rosewood back and sides, in all honesty it doesn't have the edgy appeal of the stripped-down model, or indeed the solid balance or warmth of the FG720S.

In direct comparison, its performance is a little lightweight, although in recent years, more and more players have opted for manufacturers such as Taylor and Takamine, who excel at producing acoustics with that signature top-end →



The FGX720SC's AMF filter proved a useful tool for taming some of the more inauthentic brittleness of the piezo tone

YAMAHA FGX720SC

As FG700MS except...

PRICE: £329

TYPE: Single cutaway electro-acoustic dreadnought

ELECTRICS: Yamaha System 55 preamp, PP607Y piezo pickup

FINISHES: Black (as reviewed), brown sunburst, natural

YAMAHA FGX720SC	TEST RESULTS
Build quality	★★★★★
Playability	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★
<p>■ WE LIKED Dependable performance, AMF function</p> <p>■ WE DISLIKED A little uninspiring in the tone department...</p>	

The rivals

FGX720SC

Aria FET-SPT	£179
Vintage VEC600N	£259
Cort D10FC4 Earth 100	£279

Aria's often-overlooked FET-SPT is available in some eye-catching finishes and features a four-band onboard EQ. Cort's D10FC4 is loaded with a Fishman Classic 4 preamp and is available with either mahogany or maple back and sides. While the Vintage isn't the most earth-shattering guitar in the looks department, there's certainly enough tone and playability to compete in this market

→ vitality, so if you are seeking an acoustic to really cut through, then perhaps this is the one for you.

FG720SC

Looking all mean and moody in its black livery, this Yamaha gets an extra 'X' and 'C' in its model name to denote electro-acoustic and cutaway body respectively. Otherwise very similar to the FG720S, the main differences are the presence of a preamp and treble side cutaway to facilitate easier access to those top frets.

One initial gripe that came to light was the lack of a second strap button, which is disappointing for a guitar that is otherwise aimed primarily at performance. If you want to gig with it and don't fancy the old-school, shoelace-around-the-headstock method, then you'll have to either reach for a bar stool, or drill a hole and install a button yourself.

On the electronic side of things, the preamp is powered by a single nine-volt battery, access to which is gained through a separate compartment located on the shoulder of the instrument. Yamaha's System 55 preamp is equipped with an output volume control, three-band equalisation and a slider marked 'AMF', which is short for 'Adjustable Mid-range Frequency'. Essentially, this is a mid-range filter, which not only allows for expanded tonal variation, but should also give you greater control over those troublesome frequencies susceptible to feedback in a live scenario. The neck is



FGX720SC has Yamaha's System 55 preamp with volume, three-band EQ and AMF slider

finished in a satin texture that is similar to the two previous guitars, although we felt a little more friction on this particular example.

SOUNDS: Acoustically, the overall tonality of this model lies somewhere between the two poles of the warmth of the FG720S and the lively top end of the FG730S. We found it certainly more balanced than the latter, which was to bode well for the amplified tone. As always, piezo pickups have their intrinsic limitations and some players will invariably prefer soundhole pickups, but we found the plugged-in performance of the FGX720SC to be solid and reliable, if just a little unremarkable. The AMF filter, however, proved a useful tool for taming some of the more inauthentic brittleness of the piezo tone and getting the most from the instrument.

Verdict

When it comes to consistent production of quality entry-level acoustics, Yamaha appears to be in an enviable position.

We would confidently recommend the new FG series models to any player looking for a great-value acoustic guitar – however, it was the humble, stripped-down FG700MS that had the most acoustic character to our ears.

The choice between the other two acoustic guitars is simply a subjective tonal one, while the FGX720SC is more than capable of handling the thrills and spills of a live performance. Although we might wish for slightly more memorable model names, these new Yamaha acoustics tick all of the required boxes with aplomb. **G**

Yamaha FG700MS

Guitarist RATING ★★★★★

Yamaha FG720S

Guitarist RATING ★★★★★

Yamaha FG730S

Guitarist RATING ★★★★★

Yamaha FGX720SC

Guitarist RATING ★★★★★