



Duesenberg Imperial & Double Cat 12

£1,550 & £995

The rivals

IMPERIAL

Peavey Rockingham

£499

Epiphone Wildkat £610

Gretsch G6192 Country

Club from £1,999

The Rockingham blew us away when we reviewed it (Guitarist 247) and we remain suitably impressed by its vibe, performance and modest price tag. As with Gretsch's Setzer Hot Rod models; you can opt for either natural or metallic finishes. Epiphone's cool feline harks back to classic Nashville semis and offers a pair of big old P-90s and a Bigsby fitted to the mahogany/flamed maple body and traditional feel. Great price too. If Rockabilly is your thing, you must try a Gretsch. The Country Club differs slightly from the more traditional 6120 in that it has marginally bigger body and DynaSonic rather than Filtertron pickups. Available in a range of colours, they're not exactly cheap but remain the real deal

A pair of German-designed instruments that combine 1950s stylings with a retro tinge straight from the 1920s by Simon Bradley

On first glance you may believe you've got the handle on these two instruments. But it's not just the obvious rockabilly style of the Imperial or the jangly vibe of the Double Cat 12 that should interest you: both are more versatile than they seem.

Imperial

What's unavoidable about the choice of Duesenberg semis is that many wear their Gretsch influence on their sleeve. For example, the Starplayer screams Duo Jet or single-cut White Falcon. But the Imperial is bigger than all contemporary Gretsches that we're aware of, and actually closer to Gibson Super-400 territory with a body depth of just over 3.5-inches. The light orange hue applied to the laminated spruce top is very close to the classic orange stain as traditionally utilised by Gretsch, and the entire vibe demands a Fender Bassman and a vintage tape echo!

Duesenberg certainly doesn't do anything to dissuade this impression, and although the combination of a humbucker with a P-90 single-coil isn't exactly traditional, their tones have

been offset by the provision of what the German company has called a 'Twang' pot. Classic Gretsch guitars are beset by dampers, tone shift switches and other tone altering innovations that can be a little daunting for the uninitiated. Simplicity is the key with the Imperial and the pot – sited closest to the bridge here – simply shifts the middle of the EQ, varying the tone without adding too much additional high or low end. We'll expand on this in the Sounds section of the review.

The Art Deco livery – stepped headstock, truss rod cover, logo, body 'D' decal, and the unique scratchplate – is an excellent and attractive idea, while the quality of the fittings, sourced from all over the world, is second to none: no shortcuts here at least. And according to Duesenberg; although the company is based in Germany, the wooden parts – for example – are made in Korea. These are assembled in Germany with hardware and electronics that hail from numerous Far Eastern and German sources.

Duesenberg's own brand of pickup, a Grand Vintage humbucker in the

bridge and neck DP90 single-coil, are housed in chromed casings and controlled via a standard three-way toggle switch, master tone and – sited on the lower horn – a master volume.

We're very much fans of the minimal, yet wholly proficient, vibrato. The arm is much longer than that of a standard Bigsby, so it can stay in your hand at all times. What's more, its length can be altered to suit by means of loosening a pair of small Allen screws. A very useful feature indeed.

The feel of the maple neck is more substantial than you might expect, bridging the gap between a traditional jazz archtop and a kinetic Gretsch Hot Rod. The rosewood board, rather too dry on our example, is adorned by subtle oval inlays. It's a comfortable ride and the jumbo frets have been nicely finished.

What's not so impressive is the quality of the body's finish. The neck heel is rather messy with a fine mist of orange betraying some sub-standard masking. What's more, blotches of red can be seen all over the top – something that we were at a loss to



The Imperial's Twang pot is an innovation of epic proportions and allows for a huge and varying choice of classic semi-acoustic tones

IMPERIAL	TEST RESULTS
Build quality	★★★★★
Playability	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★

■ **WE LIKED** The great tones and lovely vibrato

■ **WE DISLIKED** The finish of the body is well below par at this price

explain. Now, while neither of these faults will affect how the guitar plays and sounds, we can't help but feel that there's little excuse for this sort of thing on a £1,500+ guitar. Here's hoping they are restricted to our example only, but it's a disappointment after all the good that has gone before.

SOUNDS: Fortunately, we have nothing but praise for the tonal aspects of the Imperial, and the Twang pot certainly gives you far more than the standard three tones. The basic sounds from both pickups are full without being overpowering. By using the Twang pot you can obtain the gamut of classic semi-acoustic tones – all the way from the treble-soaked flavour of Scotty Moore to a mellow, woody jazz quality on a par with a huge and unwieldy Gibson L-5.

The vibrato really is a dream, and its creak-free operation is a refreshing change from the cheaper units prevalent these days. Restringing is unlikely to be the usual convoluted affair as you simply push the strings through the relevant slot in the roller, rather than trying to get them to stay on pins in the old-fashioned manner.

Double Cat 12

Although there's little doubt that electric 12-strings are something of an acquired taste, their tone is an absolute classic – courtesy of a certain quartet from Liverpool. The Double Cat 12 does doff its hat in the direction of a Rickenbacker 330/12, thanks to the similarly flat look and unusual

The Imperial's vibrato arm is longer than on a standard Bigsby, and is adjustable too



The maple neck feels substantial and the rosewood board features subtle oval inlays

soundhole, but it's the Art Deco influence that again sets it apart from the remainder of the 12-string market.

The same HB/P-90-style pickup mix as the Imperial is controlled by a tone, volume and three-way lever. There's little room for complaint as far as the front panel goes and the 12 strings are held fast by a standard stop tail and tune-o-matic-style bridge.

The body comprises an American

alder base that has been hollowed out either side of what is – in effect – a centre block. And although proceedings are a little shabby internally, there are no finish disasters to report, save a build-up of colour at the point of the lower horn and wobbly lines around the headstock binding.

Some compromise with the neck width is obvious with a 12-string, but the Double Cat's maple neck is just

DUESENBERG IMPERIAL

PRICE: £1,550 (inc case)

ORIGIN: Korea/Germany

TYPE: Single-cut semi-acoustic electric

BODY: Laminated flamed maple with arched laminated spruce top

NECK: Hardrock maple, set

SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5-inches)

NUT/WIDTH: Ivoroid/42mm

FINGERBOARD: Indian rosewood, 305mm (12-inch) radius

FRETS: 22, jumbo

HARDWARE: Nickel-plated Duesenberg tuners with three-step buttons, floating ebony/tune-o-matic-style bridge, Super Tremola vibrato

STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 52mm

ELECTRICS: Duesenberg Grand Vintage HB (bridge) & DP90 single-coil (neck), master volume, master tone, three-way toggle, mid-shift 'Twang' pot

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.6/7.94

OPTIONS: None

LEFT-HANDERS: Certain models only.

The closest leftie to the Imperial is the Carl Carlton LH (£1,175)

FINISHES: Light orange (as reviewed), red burst

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DUESENBERG IMPERIAL & DOUBLE CAT 12 £1,550 & £995

ELECTRICS  GUITARIST INTERACTIVE



The Double Cat's P-90 was best for a majority of the tones, simply because the tone was thinner but the humbucker serves you well too

DUESENBERG DOUBLE CAT 12
PRICE: £995 (inc case)
ORIGIN: Korea/Germany
TYPE: Off-set semi-acoustic electric 12-string
BODY: Alder with maple veneer top
NECK: Hardrock maple, set
SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5-inches)
NUT/WIDTH: Graphite/45mm
FINGERBOARD: Indian rosewood, 305mm (12-inch) radius
FRETS: 22, jumbo
HARDWARE: Tune-o-matic-style bridge, stud tailpiece, nickel-plated Kluson tuners
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 52mm (centres)
ELECTRICS: Duesenberg Grand Vintage HB (bridge) & DP90 single-coil (neck), master volume, master tone, three-way lever
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.18/7
OPTIONS: The standard six-string version of the Double Cat goes for £969
FINISHES: Fire burst (as reviewed), black

The rivals

DOUBLE CAT 12	
Italia Rimini 12	£499
Fender Stratocaster XII	£679
Maton MS500/12	£949

Leaving aside any debate on Italia's crazy 'toilet seat' finish, you'll certainly appreciate the price and tone of this Ricky 330 wannabe. The Strat XII remains a 12-string version of a classic design and the in-between tones from the trio of vintage-style pickups are especially evocative. Check the Maton review in this issue for a model that, by coincidence, is just about the mirror image our Aryan example...



The strings are arranged traditionally on the Double Cat, rather than Rickenbacker-style



Nickel-plated Kluson tuners adorn the Double Cat's headstock


→ 45mm at the nut. Of course, it can go too far the other way – with some Rickys we've played being too thin to play comfortably. That's not the case here and, once we'd spent some time tuning, we encountered no playing niggles to speak of. The strings are arranged in a traditional manner, rather than akin to a Rickenbacker. The four octave strings are set above their higher-gauge siblings, but be aware that the admittedly cool slotted head makes

restringing the Double Cat something of a chore. **SOUNDS:** There are a number of 12-string moments that just have to be played and the intro to Hotel California, A Hard Day's Night and just about anything by The Byrds is faithfully reproduced here. We found the P-90 was best for a majority of the tones, simply because the tone was thinner, but when more body is required, the humbucker serves you well too.

DOUBLE CAT 12	TEST RESULTS
Build quality	★★★★★
Playability	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★
■ WE LIKED The comfortable neck and classic tones	
■ WE DISLIKED The slotted headstock can make restringing an absolute 'mare	

For open strums there's nothing like a 12-string and, with dollops of reverb and a touch of chorus, you find yourself writing songs with 'sky' and 'mountain' in the title as a matter of course. A light hand is required as too much finger-pressure can send the four octave strings slightly out of tune and, though a heavy rock style works better than you may perceive, we're not sure if there's a future for 12-string thrash!

Verdict

Here are two very nice guitars that, to greater or lesser extents, let themselves down with shoddy finishing details. In the case of the Imperial, the \$1,550 price tag is OTT considering the level of the sub-standard finishing of the body, and no level of great tones and playability can dissuade us from this opinion. The Twang pot is an innovation of epic proportions and allows for a huge choice of classic semi-acoustic tones: just make sure you check the body for any flaws before buying. The Double Cat fairs slightly better, and we're glad that there's now a genuine choice of quality electric 12-string if Rickenbacker just doesn't excite you. Buy a decent tuner though as, without one, tuning can take days. If you can justify the guitar's cost you'll never be let down. What a shame that the Imperial is hardly mint... 

Duesenberg Imperial	
Guitarist RATING	★★★★★
Double Cat 12	
Guitarist RATING	★★★★★