

EPIPHONE DAVE NAVARRO SIGNATURE £499

This agile new electro-acoustic combines graveyard glitz with rock star hardware

DAVE Navarro is one of those guys it would be easy to hate: devilishly handsome and a fiendish guitarist to boot, he's torn it up with some seriously bitchin' bands, including Jane's Addiction and Red Hot Chili Peppers. Now here's the child of his collaboration with Epiphone – a versatile acoustic with 'pro' touches that promise to make it more than a toy for wannabees.

Whatever else it might be, the Epiphone Navarro model doesn't lack presence. The review model comes in a hard case so deep and robust you could rig it with a mast

Grover machineheads, the Navarro boasts an eSonic preamp designed and made by pickup specialists Shadow. This has a master volume, simple bass and treble EQ, and a phase switch that helps to quickly suppress feedback during play. There's also a Dynamics slider that alters the vibe of the tone from zesty and resonant to flat and focused. The built-in chromatic tuner is accurate and easy to use. Engaging the tuner mutes the output, so you can spare the audience your tune-up noises in between songs.

The Shadow Nanoflex pickup is intriguing, too, because it isn't the usual piezo unit. It's built around seven layers of what Shadow coyly calls "selected materials" located beneath the guitar's saddle. This arrangement is designed to capture

more of the natural tone from the guitar's body as well as the strings. Plugged in, the Navarro does in fact sound a little more detailed and airy than your average piezo-equipped plucker, which could give it a useful sonic edge in bar room gigs.

For the gigging rock guitarist, there's plenty to like here: the fast action and generous cutaway mean you can go from nought to Nuno in the twinkling of a diamond ear-stud, while features like the Nanoflex pickup and gig-friendly preamp promise a smooth ride onstage. If you play in a metal or prog band and need an agile acoustic for mascara-melting ballads, this could be the axe for you. But in terms of raw acoustic sound, the Navarro Signature adds up to slightly less than the sum of its parts – and that's not the answer tonehounds will be looking for, especially at just under 500 sheets.

Jamie Dickson

"The overall effect is modern if a trifle 'lite' on charisma"

and sail the Atlantic. Opening the coffin-like lid reveals a darkly luxurious axe; its hexagram fret markers, abalone inlay and roosting-crow artwork have an understated, graveyard cool that will definitely turn heads.

The first few strums reveal a light, rapid action and a pleasant, C-profile neck. The Navarro is made out of decent wood, with a solid sitka spruce top and mahogany back, and is loosely based on a Gibson Hummingbird. That's why it's all the more disappointing that the tone lacks the richness and sweetness you might expect. The bell-like, sustaining bass is nice, but north of that is a noticeable hole in the mid range, while a clear but slightly antiseptic treble tops the sound off. The overall effect is modern, articulate and useable – if a trifle 'lite' on charisma.

Things are rosier on the hardware side. As well as genuine

AT A GLANCE

BODY: Solid sitka spruce top, solid mahogany back, laminated mahogany sides
NECK: Mahogany
FINGERBOARD: Ebony
SCALE: 25 1/2"
ELECTRONICS: eSonic preamp, Shadow Nanoflex pickup
HARDWARE: Nickel
LEFT-HANDED: Yes
FINISH: Gloss Ebony
CONTACT: Gibson Europe
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1 FRETBOARD

THESE hexagram fretmarkers are a witchy touch, but the neck is fast and instantly familiar. Lightning-quick playability is one of the strongest features of this axe

2 PICKGUARD

THE crows-in-flight artwork and 'Jane' moniker on the trussrod cover lend the Navarro a custom vibe, while the abalone soundhole inlay adds a touch of luxury

3 ELECTRONICS

THE eSonic preamp makes tuning a breeze, and offers potential for tone sculpting. But the underlying acoustic tone lacks the magic the styling hints at

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