



# Slight Returns

Guild welcomes back a small-bodied favourite with new twists and hosts the return of another familiar name...

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## GUILD M-40E AND M-240E TROUBADOUR

£1,785 & £445

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### What You Need To Know

**1 M-40 – is this a new model?**  
Yes, and no. It's the guitar formerly known as the F-20, a concert-shaped folk guitar from the late 60s and 70s. With the help of master luthier Ren Ferguson, Guild are promising the same vintage character.

**2 What kind of character are they promising?**  
Guild calls it a "delicate, well-rounded tone that is perfect for fingerstyle playing and light strumming". And the old F-20s were known for a sound that punched above their smaller stature so we hope to see that lineage continued, this time with an LR Baggs Element VTC to add versatility for stage use.

**3 So where does the M-240 come in?**  
This is an affordable take on the M-40 dimensions, with laminate mahogany back and sides. But instead of an undersaddle pickup, it has a removable magnetic soundhole unit that also happens to be the first new DeArmond product in a long time.

**B**ack in the late 1960s Guild enjoyed a golden era, building concert-sized guitars that attracted a wealth of folk players. Alongside the all-mahogany M-20, associated with Nick Drake after its inclusion on the cover of his 1971 album *Bryter Layter*, the spruce-topped F-20 and the longer scale F-30 won favour for their surprisingly full sounds. But for years they remained something of an underrated gem on the vintage market.

Now the old Troubadour has returned with a new name and the expectation of recharging its reputation. Alongside it there's a more affordable Westerly Series option that also hosts the surprise 21st century return for DeArmond. For the gigging player, these two guitars offer distinctly different experiences beyond the obvious build, spec and price comparisons.

This isn't the first time the F-20 design has returned to Guild's line-up, but it is a Californian debut. In 2012 Guild, then under Fender ownership, recognised the growing interest in parlour-sized acoustics and began producing the standard model again in its facility in New Hartford, Connecticut.

Two years later the factory ceased production, and those models are hard to find, but with ownership of the Guild brand passing to the Cordoba Music Group and the New Hartford machinery moving to Ventura County in the Golden State for production in 2015, a Californian F-20 now makes a return. Of sorts. Unlike Guild's M-20, it's now under a new moniker. The 'M' denoting the body size and the 40 signifying spruce top/mahogany

body. So, can this new edition uphold the reputation?

Joining it is a new model under the Chinese-made Westerly series, an affordable take on the F-20 blueprint with an interesting twist; a new DeArmond product. The first new design from the Guild-owned brand in this century, no less. And fittingly from the company that brought players the first attachable magnetic pickup, it's a passive soundhole affair. A rare addition indeed for an out-of-the-box acoustic.

With the more understated charms of satin finishes still very much in demand amongst players, Guild has adopted to change from the F-20 gloss tradition and adopt it for both models here, with the M-40E available in this natural and an antique sunburst.

For our Californian Guild it brings a contemporary touch to the tradition, and it works well here with the minimalist pinstripe rosette and purfling. The tortoiseshell scratchplate also ties in pleasingly with the dark mahogany back, sides and neck.

The M-40E is a lightweight guitar but its neck is an interesting blend of

The old Troubadour has a new name, but can this edition uphold its well-earned reputation?



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1. The mahogany neck shade stands out as lighter from the back and sides on the M-240E

2. The M-40E's LR Baggs Element volume and tone controls are placed subtly inside the soundhole and are powered by an internally-mounted 9V battery



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accessibility and substantial width. The smooth satin finish and C-shape is welcoming to the palm, but the nut width on this new chapter for the F-20 story is actually wider than the 1960s examples at 44.45mm, with vintage F-20 examples we've seen at around 43mm. It's a surprising change.

The M-240E Troubadour is billed as a homage to its American sibling, but that doesn't extend to its finish options. Though a piezo-fitted M-240E is available in natural, this Troubadour version is only in antique sunburst. But Guild has clearly put thought into making the aesthetic of a soundhole-mounted pickup work here. It's a neat touch to see the tortoiseshell trim match the scratchplate, that in turn ties in with the dark edges of

the two-colour sunburst and making this soundhole more at home here than it could have done. It's a tidy build, with an aesthetic only disrupted by the notably lighter shade and different grain of the mahogany neck compared to the body.

The 240's deviations from its inspiration go even further than electronics and the laminate back sides, though: the 240E features Guild's arched back, and the nut width is closer to the 60s F-20s at 42.86mm, with a narrower string spacing at the bridge of 55mm compared to the M-40E's 57mm for a slimmer C-shape neck. The Troubadour is clearly more than a lower spec version of big bro. Instead, Guild has taken the body blueprint to do something distinct.

## THE RIVALS



### FENDER PM-2 DELUXE PARLOUR ALL MAHOGANY £699

This Sitka spruce/rosewood model with Fishman's bespoke Paramount system is said to be tailored for each model. With ebony fretboard, solid construction and deluxe hardcase, the PM-2 furthers Fender's commitment to the acoustic sector.

[www.fender.com](http://www.fender.com)



### YAMAHA LS16 ARE £850

A smaller body that's big on value. A solid rosewood back and sides and an ebony board offer spec above the price point. The result is an impressively balanced tone but EQ control will have to come from an external source.

[www.yamaha.com](http://www.yamaha.com)



### MARTIN 00-15ME £1,750

The all-mahogany 15 Series has a well-earned reputation for workhorse guitars in the studio and on stage, and this UK exclusive electro model is no exception. The added versatility here is provided by the onboard Fishman Gold + Plus system – with controls subtly tucked away.

[www.martinguitar.com](http://www.martinguitar.com)



### GIBSON LG-2 AMERICAN EAGLE £1,349

Another new spin on an old model, the LG-2 features the same LR Baggs Element system as the M-40E (and a similar nut width too). It's a plaintive design and that vibe continues to the v-shape neck that's true to its Americana roots.

[www.gibson.com](http://www.gibson.com)



The M-40E is a natural home for blues roots and country folk with a broad low end

### Feel & Sounds

With a wide neck and ample string spacing, the M-40E is a guitar that responds well to more muscular playing – whether that be chordwork or strong fingerpickers from the Nick Drake school of folk finesse. Its light weight and intimate proportions actually encourage that kind of physicality. The tension and medium action here on our test guitar mean we need it too, but the payoff is strong treble response and a defined vintage warmth rather than modern hi-fi chordal sparkle. It's a natural home for blues roots and country folk with a low end that feels broad for this body size while allowing the throaty and ringing high mid and treble strengths to come to the fore. And it's a voice that lends itself to recording without having to worry about dialling the low end out at the mixing stage. This is the kind of voice and neck experience that also feels like a good excuse to tune down and dust off the slide too.

The M-240E's lower action and slender neck profile will be more welcoming to those used to more modern acoustic experiences, and is certainly easy on the digits for fingerstyle and fast runs, though unsurprisingly the satin neck isn't as luxurious as the M-40E's. The action is so low here things get a little buzzy in DADGAD and more so in open G, but Guild's open gear tuners perform smoothly and stably as we adjust.

The voice that comes through here is one that leans in favour of resonant mids

rather than the warmer, stronger definition of the M40E. Lows are thinner but not unsurprisingly so for this shape and in chord work there's an airy brightness with light phasing in comparison to the Californian guitar's darker tonality.

Plugging in reveals some interesting results. The M-40E is fitted with the LR Baggs Element VTC under-saddle pickup and setting the tone control at its mid point immediately reveals a hotter bass response than expected. As the tone control here is a treble roll-off we took our acoustic combo's bass EQ down two notches to regain more of the guitar's natural acoustic balance.

Some may prefer the prospect of boosted lows and the Element – which also captures the soundboard's movements – certainly reflects an acoustic timbre very well for an undersaddle system. The dynamics

sound and feel natural without any unwanted compression.

The reputation DeArmond built with its magnetic soundhole pickups has meant they are still in high demand on the used market to this day. Rather than reissue a classic from the 60s, the brand has opted to launch the new Tone Boss passive humbucker found here. The results are pleasing; rounded rather than metallic or harsh. With only a volume control on the pickup you'll need to EQ with amp or preamp pedal, and due to the passive nature of the Tone Boss it benefits from some external boost too. It's intriguing to see both DeArmond and Guild demo videos featuring this guitar show it being played with overdrive, too, and Guild are keen to point out that flexibility by stating it's 'compatible with any amplifier', unlike a piezo where the results can be teeth-





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rattlingly unpleasant. It's not too shabby through our VOX AC15 when EQ'd, furthering this guitar's potential versatility.

### Verdict

There's two different continuations of the F-20 legacy here, and we admire Guild's commitment to offering distinct new models to the market that each bring a new experience to players. The caveat is they're not trying to please everyone with a vanilla all-rounder approach. The addition of the soundhole pickup to the M-240E is a new option for gigging players in a hotly contested area of the market and currently a unique out-of-the-box proposition. And the decision to update the F-20 with a new name and wider neck means it is not merely a reissue in satin – though the classic F-20 shaped void that it now leaves is somewhat surprising to see. But fingerstylists especially may well delight in the change and the result is a vintage voice of its own in the pantheon of contemporary small-bodied electro acoustics. **G**

3. The traditional Guild headstock on the M-240E Troubadour is adorned with open gear tuners with 14:1 ratio

4. The M-240E's DeArmond Tone Boss passive magnetic pickup will be available to buy separately for £72.99

5. The M-40E's 57mm string spacing at the bridge is wider than the old F-20's and it makes for a distinct playing experience



### GUILD M40E TROUBADOUR

**PRICE:** £1,785 (inc hardcase)  
**ORIGIN:** USA  
**TYPE:** Concert electro acoustic  
**TOP:** Solid Sitka spruce  
**BACK/SIDES:** Solid African mahogany  
**MAX RIM DEPTH:** 107mm  
**MAX BODY WIDTH:** 350mm  
**NECK:** Mahogany  
**SCALE LENGTH:** 629mm (24.75")  
**TUNERS:** Guild vintage-style open gear in nickel with cream buttons, 20:1 ratio  
**NUT/WIDTH:** Bone, 44.5mm  
**FINGERBOARD:** Indian rosewood, 305mm (12") radius  
**FRETS:** 20  
**BRIDGE/SPACING:** Indian rosewood/57mm  
**ELECTRICS:** LR Baggs Element with volume and tone control  
**WEIGHT (kg/lb):** 1.3/2.86  
**RANGE OPTIONS:** M-40 non-electro model available in natural (£1,609) and Antique Sunburst (£1,699); M-140 concert-shape with solid African mahogany back and sides available with or without Fishman Sonitone electronics (£699 and £795 in natural only)  
**LEFT-HANDERS:** No  
**FINISHES:** Natural (as reviewed), Antique Sunburst (£1,875)



### GUILD M240E TROUBADOUR

**PRICE:** £445 (inc gigbag)  
**ORIGIN:** China  
**TYPE:** Concert electro-acoustic  
**TOP:** Solid Sitka spruce  
**BACK/SIDES:** Laminated mahogany  
**MAX RIM DEPTH:** 107mm  
**MAX BODY WIDTH:** 350mm  
**NECK:** Mahogany  
**SCALE LENGTH:** 629mm (24.75")  
**TUNERS:** Guild vintage-style open gear nickel, 14:1 ratio  
**NUT/WIDTH:** Bone/42.86mm  
**FINGERBOARD:** Rosewood, 406mm (16") radius  
**FRETS:** 20  
**BRIDGE/SPACING:** Compensated bone/55mm  
**ELECTRICS:** DeArmond Tone Boss magnetic humbucker soundhole-mounted pickup (passive)  
**WEIGHT (kg/lb):** 1.3/2.86  
**RANGE OPTIONS:** The non-Troubadour M240E Archback available in natural with Guild's AP-1 Active Acoustic Piezo Pickup (£385 with Kelly)  
**LEFT-HANDERS:** No  
**FINISHES:** Vintage sunburst (as reviewed)

8/10

**Pros** Strong and muscular highs for a small body, an update that isn't afraid to make bold changes

**Cons** F-20 fans may feel let down with the neck changes and may not suit smaller-handed players

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**Pros:** Good playability, installed soundhole pickup offers something different in a crowded marketplace

**Cons:** Action on our test model is a little buzzy, no upper strap button supplied