

# Guild D55 & F50E

£2,279 & £2,399

Fender-owned, Tacoma-made; so are these two heritage flat-tops still the Guilds of old? They're even better! by Jim Chapman

PHOTOGRAPHY: JESSE WILD

Since its purchase by Fender in 1995, Guild has twice relocated manufacturing of its US-made acoustics. The old Westerly, Rhode Island plant – originally built as a furniture factory, subject to the extremes of the East Coast climate and never ideally suited to guitar assembly – was closed in 2001 and production transferred to Fender's Corona facility in California. This continued until early 2005 when, as a result of Fender's takeover of Tacoma Guitars, manufacturing was moved north to the latter's factory in its namesake town of Tacoma, Washington, where both brands are now made side by side.

With Guild last year having launched the GAD range of lower-cost Chinese-made acoustics, the present-day emphasis for American production is on a concise line-up of what can be described as heritage models, instruments that evoke some of the company's original designs from the 1950s and 1960s. The D55 dreadnought and F50 jumbo are two such examples.

## D55

Though Guild was founded in 1953 it wasn't until a decade later that the company introduced any dreadnoughts, the debut models being the mahogany-backed D40 and

rosewood D50 which became long-running, popular sellers and are included in the current catalogue. The more upmarket D55 appeared in 1968, initially to special order only but eventually added as a regular stock line thanks to steady customer demand. Over the years there have been occasional, more elaborately adorned models, such as the D80 and D100, but from a long-term viewpoint it's accurate to regard the D55 as Guild's flagship dreadnought – the company's answer, if you like, to Martin's D45.

With this in mind, it's no surprise to find that the nitrocellulose-lacquered D55 is pretty well loaded in the



GUILD D55	TEST RESULTS
Build quality	★★★★★
Playability	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★
■ <b>WE LIKED</b> General high-grade build; slick low-profile neck; rich sound	
■ <b>WE DISLIKED</b> Iffy alignment of some of the fingerboard block markers	

## The D55's sound is not only resonant, quite loud and projecting, but equally important, there's also plenty of richly toned dynamic suppleness

cosmetic department. The AAA-grade solid spruce top – a fine, clean, evenly grained example – sports an abalone-inlaid soundhole rosette and Guild's distinctively shaped tortie scratchplate, while the straight-grained, bookmatched all-solid rosewood back and sides carry a wood-mosaic centre line down the back. Contrasting against the dark brown of the rosewood is five-ply white/black binding back and front, this treatment echoed around the rims with similar but finer-gauge multi-ply coachlinings.

Most striking is the adornment of the guitar's ebony fingerboard. Apart from body-matching white binding that continues around the peghead, there are twin longitudinal multi-ply white/black strips inlaid further into the fretboard, more or less coinciding with the paths of the top and bottom strings. Completing the finery hereabouts are pearl block position markers, each inlaid with a central 'V' of abalone. In the instrument's otherwise exemplary build quality, this is the one area where detailing is less than perfect. A few of the blocks are visibly out of square with the fretting, suggesting a rushed job or



The solid rosewood back carries a wood-mosaic centre line

a poorly set up jig when the marker recesses were being routed out. It's interesting to note that there are no such inconsistencies on our F50E jumbo's similarly decorated fingerboard.

In keeping with the original D55, the

guitar's black-faced peghead is Guild's large version, with the 'G-shield' motif that preceded the change on many other Guild flat-tops in the early sixties to the nowadays more familiar column-and-crown 'Chesterfield' logo. Top-line models like the D55 and F50, however, ➔

### GUILD D55

**PRICE:** £2,279 inc case

**ORIGIN:** USA

**TYPE:** Dreadnought acoustic

**TOP:** Solid spruce

**BACK/SIDES:** Solid rosewood

**MAX RIM DEPTH:** 124mm

**MAX BODY WIDTH:** 405mm

**NECK:** Mahogany/maple/mahogany

**SCALE LENGTH:** 652mm

**TUNERS:** Gold Grovers

**NUT/WIDTH:** Bone/43.5mm

**FINGERBOARD:** Bound ebony

**FRETS:** 20, thin

**BRIDGE/SPACING:** Ebony with bone saddle/54.5mm

**WEIGHT (kg/lb):** 2.59/5.7

**OPTIONS:** D55E electro (£2,399) with Fishman

Acoustic Matrix active endpin system

**LEFT-HANDERS:** No

**FINISH:** Gloss natural (as reviewed), Antique Burst

**Fender GBI**

**01342 331711**

[www.fender.co.uk](http://www.fender.co.uk) or

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



## GUILD D55 & F50E £2,279 & £2,399

ACOUSTIC & ELECTRO-ACOUSTIC



★★★★★  
Guitarist  
CHOICE

### The rivals

#### D55

Martin D41	£2,869
Taylor 810	£2,449
Larrivée D10	£2,199

Sitting between the D35 and much pricier D45, Martin's D41 includes abalone hexagon markers, 45-style abalone-inlaid rosette and a vertical-block peghead logo. The 810 from Taylor features updated decorative pearl position markers, revised white/black body binding and black-buttoned gold-plated tuners. Cosmetics on Larrivée's D10 embrace abalone top purfling, deluxe abalone 'board inlays and a sterling silver-edged headstock. All three dreadnoughts are spruce/rosewood with ebony 'board and bridge.

#### F50E

Gibson J150	£2,520
Taylor 615CE	£2,999
Avalon L740 Custom Premier	(from) £2,370

Similarly ornate in looks to Gibson's famous J200, the more affordable J150 adds discreet electro powering via a Fishman active endpin system. The cutaway 615CE from Taylor, including an abalone rosette and pearl leaf fingerboard inlays, is powered by the multi-sensor Expression System with two-band preamp. Avalon's L740 offers wood purflings, a five-piece sandwich-laminate neck and a price-inclusive choice of neck profiles. Allow extra for a factory-fitted electro system. All three jumbos are spruce/figured maple.

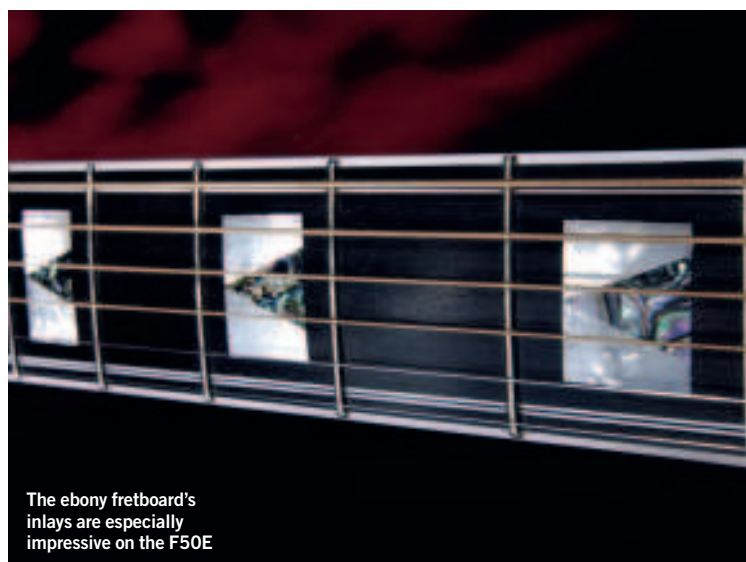
GUILD F50E	TEST RESULTS
Build quality	★★★★★
Playability	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★

■ **WE LIKED** Fine-playing; handsomely turned out

■ **WE DISLIKED** Fulsome low end can sound a tad over-lively

→ continued to use the G-shield. The choice of large peghead is, of course, historically accurate, but this writer has always regarded it as slightly unbalanced aesthetically, rather like the whopper used on some Epiphones. It's perhaps no coincidence that when George Gruhn co-designed some new acoustics for Guild in the mid eighties, they incorporated a smaller, top-tapered, more elegant headstock that is still in use today on certain models.

Though difficult to verify precisely through its near-black staining, the D55's 25.6-inch scale neck – gloss lacquered like the rest of the instrument – is specified as a three-piece sandwich arrangement of outer lengths of mahogany with a centre strip of maple. Immediately noticeable is how shallow the flattish-back profile feels, more so than one remembers on earlier Guild dreadnoughts. The company says that while the overall depth – progressing from 21mm to 22mm – hasn't changed, the profiling has, with more wood pared away from the shouldering to give a slinkier grip. Some traditionalists may prefer the previous version, but the vast majority of us will surely relish what is an unequivocally speedy, slick player, made all the easier by our sample's comfortable action set-up and immaculately dressed fretting. An incidental benefit of the revised profile is to lend something of an airy fingerstyle feel even though width and string spacing remain standard.



The ebony fretboard's inlays are especially impressive on the F50E

Strummers and pickers are hence equally well catered for.

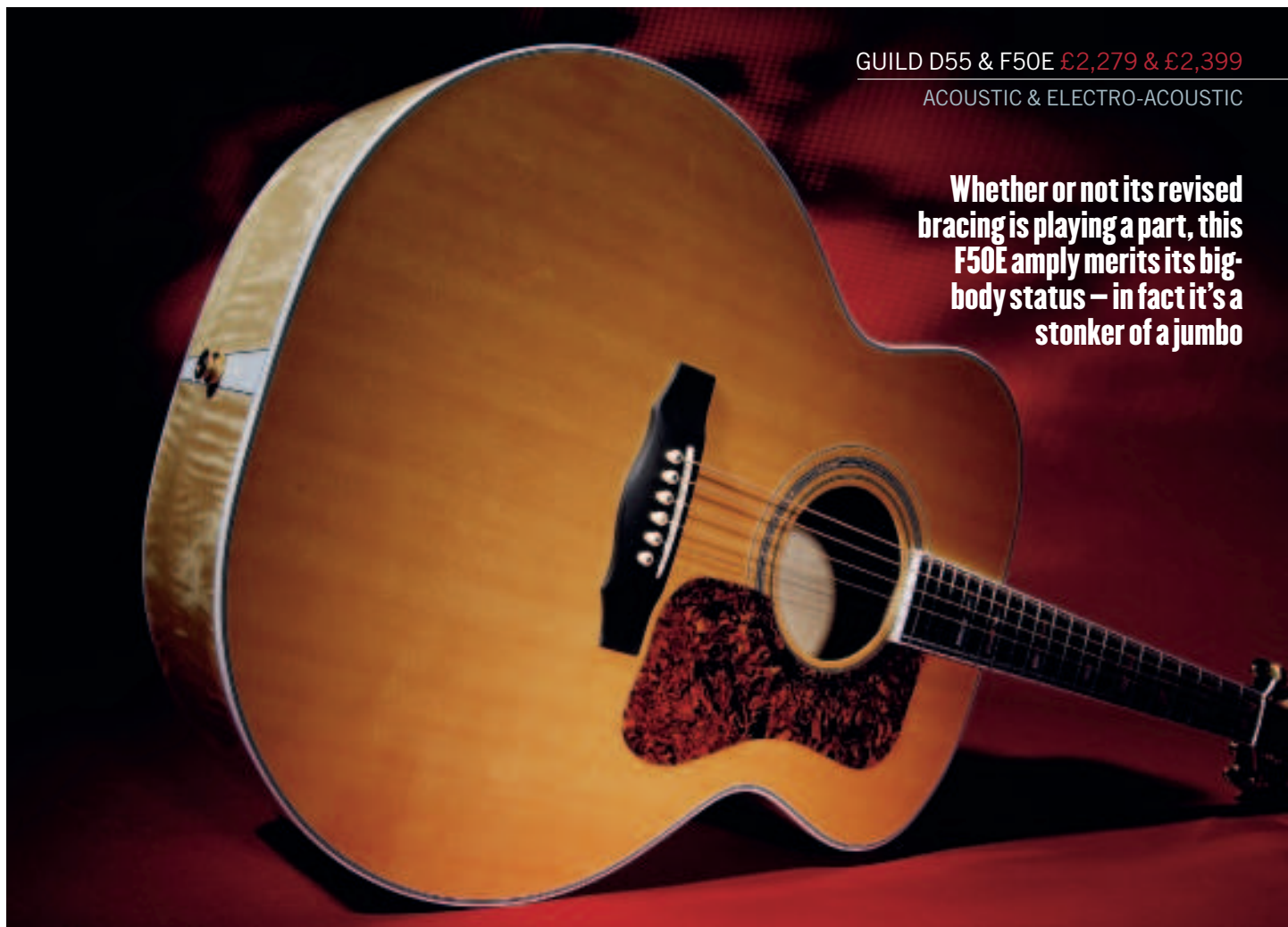
**SOUNDS:** While Guild flat-tops of yesteryear deservedly gained a reputation for near-bombproof constructional sturdiness, the trade-off could often be uninspiring, less than blossoming sounds. Our D55 still feels fairly robustly built, but it's difficult to imagine that some tweaking of voicing hasn't taken place in recent years, because the guitar performs big-time. The sound is not only resonant, quite loud and projecting, but there's also plenty of richly toned dynamic suppleness. Much of this is provided by a firm and warm bottom-end underpinning which progresses to add a likeably snappy, rosewood-like attack the more you dig in. Assessed collectively, this is a truly good dreadnought delivery.

#### F50E

The 17-inch-wide F50 jumbo harks back to Guild's early days, first

introduced in 1954 as a direct competitor to Gibson's J200. Though Guild doesn't officially use the 'E' suffix in its US catalogue designations, we've included it here to clarify that our sample is the electro-acoustic version, fitted with a Fishman Acoustic Matrix active endpin system which leaves the guitar looking like a regular acoustic save for the jack socket cum strap button. The battery is held internally in a velcro'd pouch near the heelblock.

Unlike its F50R stablemate, which features solid rosewood back and sides, the F50 uses a press-arched laminated flame-maple back with solid flame-maple sides – all as per the original. The inherent strength of the arching obviates the need for back bracing, though as anticipated the rims carry vertical reinforcing pieces, also fashioned from maple. The triple-A grade solid spruce top looks of equal quality to the dreadnought's, with plenty of cross-silking and even finer graining, perhaps for added stiffness to compensate for the front's greater



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ACOUSTIC & ELECTRO-ACOUSTIC

**Whether or not its revised bracing is playing a part, this F50E amply merits its big-body status – in fact it's a stonker of a jumbo**

→ expanse. One change to Westerly-made F50s is that the top's X bracing, including the rearward tone bars, has been shifted. The company doesn't elaborate on the repositioning except to say it is designed to increase resonance for more volume and tonal definition.

Though the guitar looks a very different instrument with its blonde (again nitrocellulose) finish and maple body figuring, the cosmetic roster is broadly similar to the D55's. The body and neck binding are identical, as are the ebony fingerboard's (this time precisely aligned) block markers and the presentation of the headstock, which shares the dreadnought's gold-plated Grover machineheads. The neck itself is again a three-piece mahogany/maple/mahogany construction with the same dark staining under the lacquering. A couple of minor differences on the instrument are that the concentrically ringed soundhole rosette has a central inlay of tortie rather than abalone, and the bridge is described as rosewood but it could just as easily pass inspection as ebony.

Handling-wise, the F50E's neck is subtly different to the dreadnought's. Give or take the merest smidgeon, the width and string spacing are the same, but there's approximately a millimetre more wood under the lower positions, resulting in constant 22mm depth all the way up to the start of the heel turn. At the same time, the profile is fashioned to more of a 'C' section. This

is in no way better or worse than the D55's, simply a variation in feel for a neck that is equally obliging, fast and comfortable. One aspect that may be preferred by those who tend to play largely open-position chords is that the modest extra amount of wood down near the nut lends a more positive grip.

**SOUNDS:** Over the years the Guild name has been as much associated with jumbos as dreadnoughts, and whether or not its revised bracing is playing a part, this F50E amply merits its big-body status – in fact it's a stonker of a jumbo. The bass response is deep and bold, and the whole ebullient unplugged sound is infused with a surprising warmth which is far from always the case with maple-backed acoustics where the delivery can sometimes be wirily, even thinly, toned.

An invariably positive trait of maple is it provides precisely integrated tonal balance across the strings, and indeed there is a well-defined smooth-edged brightness to the guitar's top end and mid-range. One minor imbalance, however, is that the enthusiastic low end occasionally dominates the sound depending on what chords you're playing, suggesting that mic'ing the instrument up may necessitate extra-careful positioning or at least some judicious equalisation on the desk.

That this kind of tailoring might be required shows up when powering the guitar up via the Fishman. The inter-string output of the under-saddle

pickup is well matched, but with backline EQ settings you might normally use for other electros, chances are that you'll find the F50E's low-frequency element just that bit too lively, even though at higher volumes it's respectably resistant to degenerating into feedback. The situation is easily sorted: simply ease back the low end on your amp, and the tonal balance is restored without compromising the guitar's big-sound signature or the pleasantly natural voicing of the Acoustic Matrix system.

### Verdict

There's a huge amount to like about these two guitars. This reviewer has never seen better Guild build quality – the D55's occasionally wonky block markers notwithstanding – and this is backed up by excellent handling and by enthusiastic, resonant, dynamic sounds that couldn't be taken for granted on Guild flat-tops of an earlier era.

All this is probably no accident. When the Tacoma factory was running as an independently owned brand, the guitars it produced were known for their big-hearted voicing, and doubtless still are. Clearly this has rubbed off on the present-day production alliance with Guild. Three cheers for that! 🍷

### Guild D55

Guitarist RATING

★★★★★

### Guild F50E

Guitarist RATING

★★★★★

### GUILD F50E

As D55 except...

**PRICE:** £2,399 inc case

**TYPE:** Jumbo electro-acoustic

**BACK/SIDES:**

Laminated, arched flame-maple back; solid flame-maple sides

**MAX RIM DEPTH:** 119mm

**MAX BODY WIDTH:** 435mm

**NUT/WIDTH:** Bone/44mm

**BRIDGE/SPACING:** Rosewood with bone saddle/55mm

**ELECTRICS:** Fishman Acoustic Matrix 1 under-saddle pickup with active endpin system

**WEIGHT (kg/lb):** 2.68/5.9

**OPTIONS:** Acoustic F50 in blonde, black or Antique Burst (£2279). Rosewood-back F50R is £2,199 (acoustic) or £2,349 (with Fishman Matrix)

**FINISH:** Gloss natural (as reviewed), black, Antique Burst