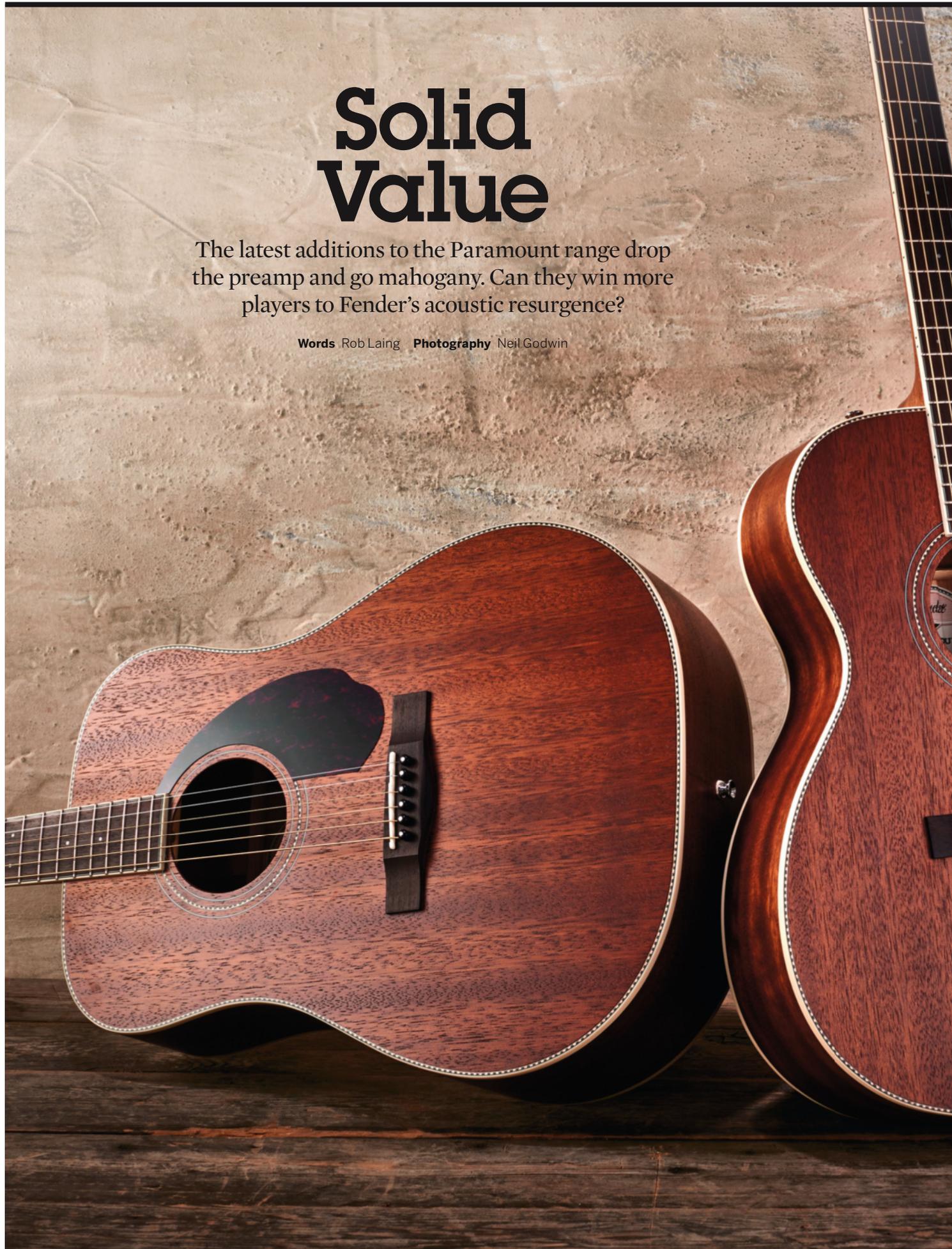


Solid Value

The latest additions to the Paramount range drop the preamp and go mahogany. Can they win more players to Fender's acoustic resurgence?

Words Rob Laing **Photography** Neil Godwin





FIRST PLAY



**FENDER PARAMOUNT
STANDARD
ALL-MAHOGANY NE**
£509

WHAT ARE THEY? A trio of all-solid mahogany additions to the Paramount series of acoustics launched by Fender in 2016

When Fender launched the Paramount series last year, it represented a new commitment to winning over players from a company that's arguably not traditionally a go-to for acoustics. With its Standard and Deluxe ranges, a two-year development paid dividends and we were suitably impressed with the PM-2 Deluxe parlor, PM-1 dreadnought and PM-3 000 Standards in issue 402. Fender was establishing itself in the lower market area with characterful models boasting solid backs and sides, which also came stage-ready with individually voiced preamps for each shape – the result of a Fishman/Fender collaboration. The Paramount Standards offered serious spec for the money, and now with its next wave of models, Fender moves from spruce/mahogany to add all-mahogany construction to the range. But that's not the only fundamental change...

Curiously, these new Standard models are not equipped with Paramount preamps. The original spruce-topped electros have gone up to £599, but it's puzzling that these new models don't have preamp-fitted model options, too. Nevertheless, their look is anything but disappointing. The mahogany tops have an indented texture to the grain that looks and feels vintage; a thin 'open-pore' satin finish leaves their organic looks unhindered.

While we're encountering more guitars in this price territory that aim for vintage Americana-style heritage, these models set a new standard for their price range. The narrower 60s-inspired headstock, open gear tuners and Fender logo and motif all set the tone, but the checkerboard purfling for the top, rosette and back strip takes on influence from further back in time and recalls the old

1. We're big fans of the checkerboard purfling here; the rosette, top edge and back strip all benefit from its retro charm

2. Though light weight, the PM-2 feels neck-heavy when strapped on, but the weight is actually reassuring, offering a welcoming and accessible feel



1



Weissenborn Style 4 rope binding. It really gives these models a premium vintage touch, and it's even more effective set against the dark mahogany than the original launch models. With such a strong cosmetic show, we're just left with a small bugbear: the only feature disrupting the vibe here is the white nut. An ivory tone to match the binding would've better served the flow of the design. But the advantage is, it's real bone.

These are lightweight guitars, too, especially for solid back and sides builds. The PM-2 is actually neck-heavy when standing with it on the strap. For the heavy-handed among us, that might give pause for thought, but the weights feel welcoming and accessible here, with the satin 'open pore' necks soon beckoning. And in play, there's the sense that it all adds to the appealing sonic qualities of these guitars.

Feel & Sounds

In many respects, the PM-1 is a textbook example of an all-mahogany dreadnought boasting a lot of the character that attracts players to this wood choice, but it feels notably livelier than some we've encountered. Compared with our Martin D-15-styled solid-mahogany Sigma, for example, the Fender's lighter weight seems to aid an airer tonality without losing muscular projection. That mahogany mid voice is there in abundance with a thumpy and defined low-end, rather than the boom that we'd hope to find from mahogany. Sustaining notes shine in the upper-mids with a pleasing, rounded bluegrass



2

For flatpickers and those pursuing a woodier tonality, look no further than the PM-1

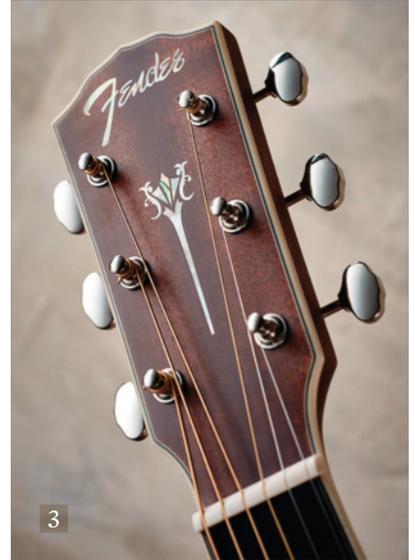
quality playing with a pick. For flatpickers and those pursuing a woodier tonality, rather than steely chime, look no further.

The differences between the dreadnought and PM-3 cutaway 000 are not surprising, but the PM-3 has distinct areas of appeal. It's a more delicate sound with less low-end than the dreadnought from the shallower depth, and it immediately feels like a welcoming home for fingerpicking, especially with the added player accessibility of the body. That satisfying roundness to notes is present and the bass still holds its own well in the balance rather than letting the mids dominate. The C-shape neck feels superb here with the lowest action of the trio, and proves itself the friendliest for lead. Which is just as well with a cutaway on offer. Access to the upper frets is even easier thanks to the placement of the strap button on the upper bout, rather than the usual neck heel. The trade-off is that this model feels a little neck-heavy on the strap.

Fender's specs say otherwise, but the PM-2 parlor's neck feels meatier, especially in comparison to its slimmer body, and there's



3. The 60s-inspired headstock design sets a vintage vibe that is very much key to Fender's future with the Paramount range



3





4

more of a medium-low action here compared with the low on the other models. Off-putting for some, but it could also be a key factor towards this being the biggest surprise of the trio. It certainly makes its extra 2mm depth over the PM-3C count. We're used to the descriptions 'boxy' and 'compression' being par for the parlor experience, but the PM-2 projects the latter trait wider than expected with more lower-end clout than you might assume from looks alone. The solid construction surely helps and the PM-2 soon reveals a versatility that could appeal to those who may not have considered a small-body model before. Again, that rounded woodiness pervades picked notes, but it really opens up for harder strumming – richer and more powerful in the bottom end where it might be expected to be predominantly mid-focused.

Verdict

Fender's latest additions prove it's on the right track with the Paramount series. If you're looking around the £500 end of the market, these are a must-try. They feel and sound well considered, each offering their own angle on mahogany appeal. We would've liked to see the Paramount preamp offered, at least as an option – widening the potential appeal these designs deserve – but as it stands, these are solid-wood acoustics with quality hard cases. A compelling sell. The PM-1 edges it for us as it encompasses mahogany's charms so well, and the company's "earthy and organic" claim is actually very accurate in sound and vision. But all three guitars combine to make a strong statement: Fender is serious about acoustics and it's reaping rewards for us players. **G**

4. Fender's higher end touches can be found throughout the Paramounts – from solid back and sides to bone nut, bone compensated saddle and ebony bridge pins. All of them add up to increase the bang for buck these models offer

5. One of the common trade-offs with electro-acoustic cutaways is the positioning of the upper strap button on the heel; it can hinder access. Fender's positioning on the upper bout takes that problem out of the equation

6. The depth of the PM-3 is a standard 000 and the differences in bottom end compared with the PM-1, and combined with the cutaway, are unsurprisingly noticeable. But the result is a folkier tonality





5

The C-shape neck feels superb on the PM-3, and proves itself the friendliest for lead



6



FENDER PM-1 STANDARD DREADNOUGHT ALL-MAHOGANY NE

PRICE: £509 (inc case)
ORIGIN: China
TYPE: Dreadnought
TOP: Mahogany
BACK/SIDES: Solid mahogany
MAX RIM DEPTH: 123mm
MAX BODY WIDTH: 398mm
NECK: Mahogany
SCALE LENGTH: 643mm (25.3")
TUNERS: Nickel open-back
NUT/WIDTH: Bone/43mm
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood, 400mm radius (15.75")
FRETS: 20, vintage-style
BRIDGE/SPACING: Rosewood with compensated bone saddle/55.5mm
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 1.4/3.08
RANGE OPTIONS: PM-1 Limited Adirondack with rosewood back and sides (£1,019) or mahogany back and sides (£889); PM-1 Deluxe electro in Natural or Vintage Sunburst with Sitka spruce top and rosewood back and sides (£729); PM-1 Standard electro (£599)
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISHES: Open-pore mahogany

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9/10

PROS A great example of an affordable solid-wood mahogany dread' with plenty of character

CONS We'd like to see what it can offer with an electro option like the original Standards



FENDER PM-2 STANDARD PARLOR ALL-MAHOGANY NE

PRICE: £509 (inc case)
ORIGIN: China
TYPE: Parlor
TOP: Mahogany
BACK/SIDES: Solid mahogany
MAX RIM DEPTH: 105mm
MAX BODY WIDTH: 359mm
NECK: Mahogany
SCALE LENGTH: 628mm (24.75")
TUNERS: Nickel open-back
NUT/WIDTH: Bone/44.45mm
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood, 400mm radius (15.75")
FRETS: 20, vintage-style
BRIDGE/SPACING: Rosewood with compensated bone saddle/55.5mm
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 1.1/2.42
RANGE OPTIONS: PM-2 Deluxe electro in Natural and Vintage Sunburst with Sitka spruce top and rosewood back and sides (£729); PM-2 Standard Parlor in Natural (£599)
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISHES: Open-pore mahogany

8/10

PROS A bigger and bolder voice than you might expect from a parlor-style guitar; great vintage looks

CONS The neck weight on the strap might not please some



FENDER PM-3 STANDARD TRIPLE-O ALL-MAHOGANY NE

PRICE: £509 (inc case)
ORIGIN: China
TYPE: 000-size cutaway
TOP: Mahogany
BACK/SIDES: Solid mahogany
MAX RIM DEPTH: 103mm
MAX BODY WIDTH: 383mm
NECK: Mahogany
SCALE LENGTH: 643 mm (25.3")
TUNERS: Nickel open-back
NUT/WIDTH: Bone/43 mm
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood, 400mm radius (15.75")
FRETS: 20, vintage-style
BRIDGE/SPACING: Rosewood with compensated bone saddle/55.5mm
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 1.2/2.64
RANGE OPTIONS: PM-1 Limited Adirondack with rosewood back and sides (£1,019) or mahogany back and sides (£889); PM-1 Deluxe electro in Natural or Vintage Sunburst with Sitka spruce top and rosewood back and sides (£729); PM-1 Standard electro (£599)
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISHES: Open-pore mahogany

8/10

PROS A cutaway with good playability, organic tonality and unhindered access thanks to the strap button placement

CONS Again, it's crying out for an electro option