

# Back In The USA

A new USA factory with new owners, but some rather familiar guitars. Those classic USA-made Guild flat-tops are back. Time to reacquaint ourselves...

Words David Mead & Dave Burrluck Photography Neil Godwin







## GUILD M-20 & D-20E £1,289 & £1,555

CONTACT **Selectron UK** PHONE **01795 419460** WEB [www.guildguitars.com](http://www.guildguitars.com)

### What You Need To Know

#### 1 What's going on?

Guild has certainly had a chequered past, not least its USA-made acoustics. The last time we wrote about them they were being made in New Hartford, Connecticut, at the same factory that made Ovation, Adamas and Hamer. Now under new ownership, they've moved to the other side of the continent, to Oxnard in California, where a new factory was established in 2015 and the first fruits are now shipping.

#### 2 Aren't the Guild Westerly series guitars made in the USA, too?

No, those are Chinese made, hence their lower price. They replaced the long-running Guild GAD series in 2015. If you've recently come across a new Guild acoustic in store, it's probably one of those.

#### 3 Why should we be interested?

That's a pretty good question. Both models on review are repros of the 60s models that undoubtedly cloned Martin who, of course, has its own USA-made all-mahogany 15 Series guitars. There's no shortage of other-brand all-mahogany concert or dreadnoughts out there, either.

**G**uild entered the flat-top steel-string market in 1954 with a limited production range of three body sizes: the 15-inch-wide Aragon F-30; the 16-inch Valencia F-40; and the 17-inch Navarre F-50 modelled on Gibson's SJ-100 with a pressed maple laminate arch back (like all of the trio). The smallest 13.75-inch-wide 'Troubadour' F-20 didn't appear until 1956 and was a big-selling guitar for Guild, along with the more 000/OM sized F-30, during the folk boom of the 60s. At this point, all of Guild's flat-tops utilised spruce tops, though the back and sides of the F-30 and F-20 had changed to mahogany by 1959. It seems the all-mahogany 'Economy'

M-20 appeared around 1958 and the all-mahogany 'Del Rio' M-30 a little later.

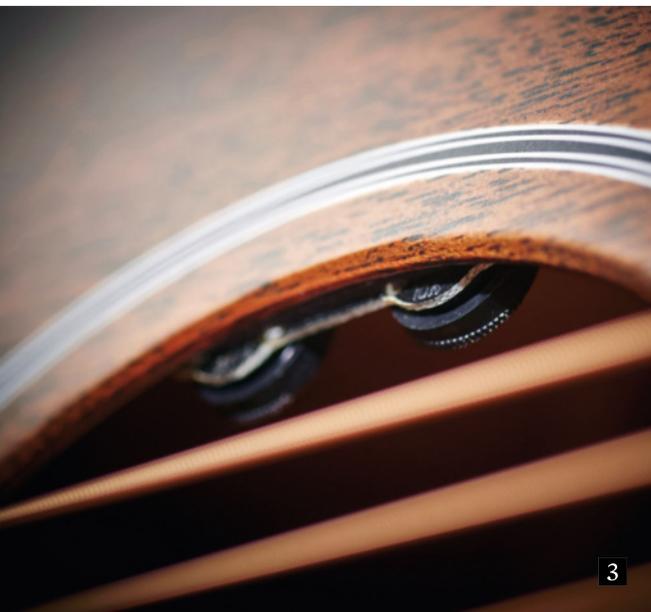
Guild was certainly late to the table with a dreadnought (it preferred the 'dreadnaught' spelling, too), but it seems that goes back to 1963 with the spruce/mahogany Dreadnaught D-40 and spruce/rosewood Dreadnaught D-50, which were swiftly renamed the 'Bluegrass Jubilee' D-40 and the 'Bluegrass Special' D-50. We can't find any early reference to a D-20, the closest being the all-mahogany Bluegrass D-25 that appeared in 1968. What is generally agreed, however, is that Guild's model designations were, ahem, rather confusing and illogical when it came to its flat-tops.



1. The tortoiseshell pickguards, plain rosettes and dark mahogany tops summon up a superb vintage vibe from these Guild acoustic guitars
2. A rosewood bridge and bone saddle help to embellish both Guilds' tonal output
3. The D-20E's LR Baggs Element VTC pickup has its controls hidden inside the soundhole
4. Both Guilds sport vintage-style open backed tuners with small oval buttons



2



3



4

But they say that history repeats itself and, in the case of Guild and particularly the M-20, that is entirely intentional. The story goes that when Guild opened its Westerly, Rhode Island, facility in 1967, it was the M-20 guitar that was first to roll off the production line in the August. Indeed, the M-20 and Mark I classical guitar (both all-mahogany with matt finishes) were the only guitars the new facility produced for some time. They were “the logical choice [with which] to train the new employees and to streamline the production procedures”, says Guild historian Hans Moust.

Back in the present and now that Guild has once again restored US production, it was decided that the brand new M-20 should follow suit and be the first acoustic guitar to meet the guitar pickin’ folks worldwide. The M-20 is famously pictured on the cover of Nick Drake’s *Bryter Layter* record (although there seems to be some

discussion as to whether he used it on the album itself). The new D-20 is the perfect foil for its smaller sibling, and when the two are placed together they form a decidedly good-looking pair. As such, it’s a case of little and large with these two acoustics, so let’s huddle together and move in for a close-up look at what’s on offer here.

First impressions count for a lot, and on first look the M-20 is a very neat-looking small-body concert-size guitar with a huge dollop of vintage chic, thanks in part to its dark chocolatey hue and plain old-world design. Standing next to it, the D-20 shares the same general look, but in the larger dreadnought size.

Both are built from solid mahogany – in fact, at this point in a *Guitarist* review, we’d usually be giving you a full rundown of the bodywoods in use here, but, to be perfectly honest, it’s easier to say which parts of this duo *aren’t* made from mahogany. That

## The Rivals

**Martin’s all mahogany 00-15M, 000-15M and D-15M in natural satin cost £1,299, including case. Electro options, exclusive to the UK, include the 00-15MEUK and 000-15MEUK, available at £1,499. Taylor’s entry-level USA-made 300 series includes various tropical mahogany-topped guitars with blackwood back and sides: the Grand Concert 322 and Dreadnought 320 cost £1,385; the electro versions are £1,662. Larrivé guitars are also built in Oxnard, a stone’s throw from Guild’s facility. Their O3 level includes the all-mahogany P-03M and OM-03M at £999 and £1,099 respectively, which have single-piece mahogany necks, ebony fingerboards and bridges and a hard shell case.**



5



6

would be the rosewood fingerboard and bridge, then! Other things that both guitars share include scalloped X bracing, bone nuts and bridge saddles, ivory-coloured bridge pins, a 305mm (12-inch) fingerboard radius, what Guild classes as 'C' profile necks, pearloid dot inlays and vintage-style open gear tuners.

As for the differences between the two models, the M-20 has a wider neck width at the nut, while the D-20 – technically a D-20E – is fitted with the LR Baggs Element VTC pickup. The guitars have different scale lengths, too, the M-20 being the shorter 629mm (24.75 inches); the D-20 is longer at 651mm (25.625 inches). Our Natural M-20 and Vintage Sunburst D-20E illustrate the only finish options, and the so-called satin 'varnish' in use is a very thin coating, which Guild claims "maintains optimum levels of tone-enhancing vibration present in the timbers".

## Guild has celebrated its return to USA building with a flourish – these models have a lot of history

### Sounds

The neck shapes of both are certainly quite Guild, a 'C', yes, but with quite steep shoulders giving it a little more 'D' in terms of feel. Both share a very mainstream depth, too, very comfortable in the hand.

Picking up the D-20E first, it's pretty obvious straight away that this is a first class strummer. Dreadnoughts are renowned for their big, booming voices, which sometimes can come across as brash and undisciplined, but that isn't the case with this example.

The mahogany body and neck impart a dark, toneful sound; it's warm with plenty of power. Switching over to fingerstyle, the bass end of the tonal spectrum is slightly soft-sounding and spongy when we were expecting some snap, but it's the warmth that comes through and impresses. Big, bold, dark and dusky would seem to be the order of the day for this dread. Plugged in, the LR Baggs system captures a mix-ready sound that would not require too much EQ tinkering at all. Balanced across the spectrum, the lows are present without being boomy, while the middle and highs are crisp and clear.

Moving on to the M-20, the wider nut width and string spacing combined with a shorter scale seems to spell out 'fingerpicker friendly' from the outset and, on picking it up, this is something that is quickly confirmed. It's a very comfortable guitar to sit and play, and great for playing



7

all of your favourite blues licks. The slight sponginess in the bass is also present here, but to a lesser extent and, switching from objectivity to subjectivity for a moment, this is probably our favourite of the two.

### Verdict

Guild has celebrated its return to USA building with a flourish, reintroducing two models with a lot of history behind them. With all-mahogany guitars enjoying something of a renaissance, these will stand tall and speak loud. Build quality is tip-top and price point is very competitive for a premium-marque all-solid build.

Of course, this is just the start of what owners Cordoba hope will become – as its heritage warrants – a major challenge to the USA's other, more established brands. The next models planned for USA production are the D-55 and the F-512 12-string. Watch this space! 

5. The neck profile of both guitars is Guild's 'C', but the steep shoulders present make it feel more like a 'D' in the hand

6. It's mahogany all the way for both the M-20 and D-20E's construction

7. The M-20 has a wider nut than its counterpart, measuring in at a fingerstyle-friendly 45mm (1.75 inches)



### GUILD M-20

**PRICE:** £1,289 (inc case)  
**ORIGIN:** USA  
**TYPE:** Concert-sized steel-string acoustic  
**TOP:** Solid mahogany  
**BACK/SIDES:** Solid mahogany  
**MAX RIM DEPTH:** 106mm (tapering to 83mm)  
**MAX BODY WIDTH:** 349mm  
**NECK:** Mahogany, 'C' profile  
**SCALE LENGTH:** 629mm (24.75")  
**TUNERS:** Individual open-backed with white oval buttons  
**NUT/WIDTH:** Bone/45mm  
**FINGERBOARD:** Rosewood, pearloid dot inlays, 305mm (12") radius  
**FRETS:** 20, medium  
**BRIDGE/SPACING:** Rosewood with uncompensated bone saddle/57.5mm  
**ELECTRICS:** See Options below  
**WEIGHT (kg/lb):** 1.65/3.63  
**OPTIONS:** The M-20 in Vintage Sunburst costs £1,379. The M-20E adds the LR Baggs Element VTC (Natural, £1,469; Sunburst, £1,555)  
**RANGE OPTIONS:** See D-20E  
**LEFT-HANDERS:** No  
**FINISHES:** Natural (as reviewed) or Vintage Sunburst – satin varnish

**Guitarist would like to thank**  
**Wunjo Guitars ([www.wunjoguitars.com](http://www.wunjoguitars.com)) for their help with this review**



9/10

**PROS** Clean, no-nonsense build at attractive price with engaging fingerstyle, friendly voice and feel

**CONS** Might be a little too mellow for some players



### GUILD D-20E

**PRICE:** £1,555 (inc case)  
**ORIGIN:** USA  
**TYPE:** Dreadnought-sized steel-string electro-acoustic  
**TOP:** Solid mahogany  
**BACK/SIDES:** Solid mahogany  
**MAX RIM DEPTH:** 127mm (tapering to 102mm)  
**MAX BODY WIDTH:** 407mm  
**NECK:** Mahogany, 'C' profile  
**SCALE LENGTH:** 651mm (25.625")  
**TUNERS:** Individual open-backed with white oval buttons  
**NUT/WIDTH:** Bone/43.29mm  
**FINGERBOARD:** Rosewood, pearloid dot inlays, 305mm (12") radius  
**FRETS:** 20, medium  
**BRIDGE/SPACING:** Rosewood with compensated bone saddle/54mm  
**ELECTRICS:** See Options below  
**WEIGHT (kg/lb):** 1.92/4.2  
**OPTIONS:** The D-20 starts at £1,289 in Natural, £1,379 in Sunburst. The D-20E, in Natural, costs £1,469  
**RANGE OPTIONS:** See M-20  
**LEFT-HANDERS:** No  
**FINISHES:** Vintage Sunburst (as reviewed) or Natural – satin varnish

8/10

**PROS** Dark-toned big sound and excellent electro performance; a road-hog!

**CONS** Might be a little too mellow for some; lots of competition in store