

## FIRST PLAY



**YAMAHA FG830**  
£360

**WHAT IS IT?** Refresh of 50-year-old FG, a solid spruce-topped dreadnought acoustic



**YAMAHA FSX830C**  
£536

**WHAT IS IT?** Small body, solid spruce-topped cutaway electro in the smaller FS size

# Golden Years

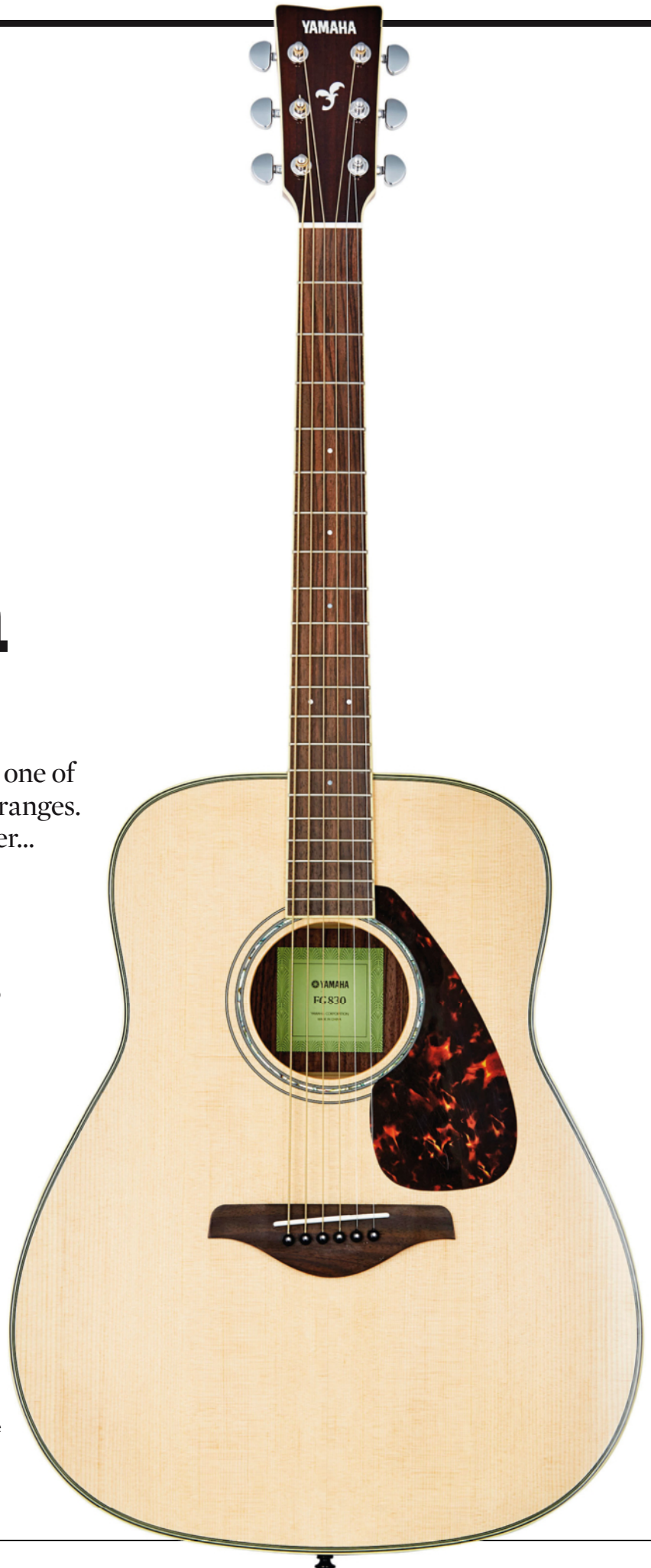
The humble 50-year-old FG is one of the world's best-selling guitar ranges. This year sees it get a makeover...

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**A** problem for most makers in these crowded times is quite simply, how do we sell more? When approaching the half century of the venerable low-end acoustic champion, the FG, Yamaha had a different problem: how to refresh something that, in sales terms, really isn't broke?

Using "proprietary software created to analyse and simulate the tonal characteristics of musical instruments", Yamaha's boffins redesigned the 700 series to create more "volume, a little more bass, a little more oomph". For the new 800 range, Yamaha boasts: scalloped bracing that "moves the resonant centre much closer to the middle of the guitar", a 0.25mm-thin finish for "great tone and superior wood protection", and "a thin back and sides construction" to ensure maximum volume and resonance.

The 800 series centres on just two body shapes: the original dreadnought FG and its smaller FS sibling. All models have solid spruce tops with a choice of laminate back and sides:







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## The electro FS has the FG's clarity and modernism, but is a little more controlled

nato/okume (800), mahogany (820), rosewood (830) and flamed maple (840, FG only). The 850 models have solid mahogany tops with laminate mahogany back and sides. Cutaway electro 'X' models are available in the 800, 820 and 830 levels and to cater for the niches – we get one left-hander and one 12-string (both acoustic in the 820 level).

In the 830 level then, our review models share the majority of specs. The spruce tops, however, are noticeably different: the FG's is pretty finely grained and flecked with a more toned appearance; the FS's is less flecked with narrower, straighter grain and is lighter in hue. Cream edge-binding is used with multi-strip inner purfling on the top, which is a little unevenly cut in places, but the gloss finish is clearly very thin – the ripples of the grain clearly visible on both guitars. The deep chocolate brown of the laminated rosewood back and sides share more similarity and there are neat details such as the cream plastic heel cap, the round-nosed heel shaping, the clean abalone-centred soundhole decoration, and the clean headstock logo and fleur motifs. A peek inside reveals equally tidy construction.

Both share the same three-piece neck construction and a pretty similar profile. The very slightly flat-backed oval fingerboards are rosewood, and while they are a little pale and



1. While the rosewood bridges on both the FG and FS are the same, the spacing is narrowed on the FS to 50mm
2. Yamaha's corporate block logo is retained here, as featured on virtually every guitar it's ever made – bar the electric Revstar range, in an effort to make the guitars a bit 'cooler'
3. Despite the lack of output muting when you engage the tuner, the System 66 preamp is well sorted with an ultra-wide, sweepable midrange
4. The FS has a more intimate, less projecting voice that's ideal for practice, performance and recording, while the FG's bigger voice, unlike many dreads, has a clean low end and sounds nicely modern
5. At these prices, we have laminated back and sides (shown on p26), and at this level they're rosewood. The overall build, however, is very sharp, including a thin finish and scalloped bracing



dry looking, they have cleanly bound edges. Fretting is from a small gauge; it's very cleanly installed with the ends sitting over the binding, but the fret tops could do with a better final polish as they're a little scratchy on bent notes.

While the electro FSX has a screwed-in metal strap button/output jack at its base (the acoustic FG has a plastic endpin) with no nuts to come loose, it doesn't have a second strap button on the heel, which seems an oversight for strapped-on stage use. The electronics have changed, too: the ART one-way pickup changes to the under-saddle from the SRT (Studio Response Technology) system. The efficient-looking preamp offers rotary controls for volume, bass, mid and treble – each EQ is centre-notched and can be cut or boosted as you'd expect – while a slider operates the AMF (Adjustable Midrange Frequency) control, which offers a very wide range between 80 and 10kHz. The onboard tuner doesn't mute the output when engaged (we've moaned about this before!), and while there's a battery status LED, there's no phase switch or notch filter.

### Feel & Sounds

The FS is unique within the Yamaha range with its shorter scale length of 635mm (25 inches) compared with the longer, Yamaha-standard 650mm (25.6 inches) of the FG.

"Its short scale makes it an excellent choice for guitarists with small hands," reckons Yamaha. Nut widths are the same, but the bridge spacing on the FS closes from the FG's 55mm to 50mm. In addition, the reduced body depth of the FS is "for improved playability, especially for beginners", says Yamaha. So, we have a £536 guitar intended for small-handed beginners? Really? Yamaha seems to have overlooked Martin's industry-standard 'short' 632.5mm (24.9-inch) scale used on thousands of 00 and 000s, for example, that is hardly aimed at small-handed beginners. And the cramped string spacing is at odds with the small-body, fingerstyle genre. Odd.

The bigger FG feels it when seated, and there's more tension to the playability, with a slightly stiffer feel. Like any good dreadnought, there's plenty of projection when you hit it, though its voice has a little less "oomph" in the low end than Yamaha might have intended. It gives the guitar a 'cleaner' tonality that sounds modern and articulate, quite piano-like. Still, compared with a couple of spruce/rosewood and spruce/mahogany Martin dreads we have on hand, it sounds a little thin.

The FS is a more comfortable seated player with a slightly down-sized sound, too. It has the FG's clarity and modernism, but is a little more controlled with a good balance across



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the frequencies. It doesn't have the power of its bigger-bodied sibling, but that could be an advantage plugged in. The Yamaha system is typically well sorted with quite a piezo-y tonality (it's hardly alone there!), but very well centred EQs and a hugely viable midrange. Nasally upper-mid peaks can be attenuated, or muddy lows cleaned up, while the treble and bass controls can be used as a more general EQ.

The FS's cramped bridge spacing might be an issue for some fingerstyle players, but it's less of a problem for more general styles: playing with a pick as you might in some acoustic versions of your electric set, the spacing and scale all 'fits', and it's this FS that gets the most playing time by quite a margin.

### Verdict

Neither is perfect, but the acoustic FG830 is damn close in terms of build with a cleaner dread-style tonality that would suit virtually any player, and it'd be money very well spent. The same applies to the FS, although whether we'd go for the electro cutaway, or the non-cut acoustic model that's £176 cheaper at full retail, is open to debate. Plugged in, it's good but a little piezo-y, and there's no tuner mute. When we put on an LR Baggs M-1 Active soundhole pickup (around the same cost as the acoustic/electro price difference), the FS sounded superb; likewise, a quick mic'd recording produced excellent results. However, that bridge spacing might just be too tight for a serious fingerstyle player and it seems a major oversight on the FS, as does putting the short scale length into the beginner's category when slightly shorter scales are standard on both Martin and Taylor, not to mention electric brands such as Gibson and PRS.

Long live the FG – but the FS, in acoustic or electro formats, is a missed opportunity. **G**



### YAMAHA FG830

**PRICE:** £360  
**ORIGIN:** China  
**TYPE:** Dreadnought-sized steel-string acoustic  
**TOP:** Solid spruce  
**BACK/SIDES:** Laminated rosewood  
**MAX RIM DEPTH:** 118mm (tapering to 100mm)  
**MAX BODY WIDTH:** 412mm  
**NECK:** Nato  
**SCALE LENGTH:** 650mm (25.6")  
**TUNERS:** Individual die-cast chrome  
**NUT/WIDTH:** Urea/43.45mm (36.5mm)  
**FINGERBOARD:** Bound rosewood, dot inlays, 400mm (15.75") radius  
**FRETS:** 20, small  
**BRIDGE/SPACING:** Rosewood w/ compensated urea saddle/55mm  
**ELECTRICS:** No  
**WEIGHT (kg/lb):** 2.02/4.4  
**OPTIONS:** The FGX830C electro cutaway version costs £536  
**RANGE OPTIONS:** Acoustic FGs: all-matte FG800M (£213), gloss FG800 (£268), FG820 (£305), FG840 (£398), FG850 (£398), FG820-12 (£351). Electro FGs: FGX800C (£370), FGX820C (£462)  
**LEFT-HANDERS:** No, check the FG820L (£351)  
**FINISHES:** Natural (as reviewed), Tobacco Brown Sunburst, Autumn Burst – gloss body with satin neck

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**PROS** A great modern dreadnought for the start-up or more experienced player

**CONS** Lacks some traditional dread-like low-end power



### YAMAHA FSX830C

**PRICE:** £536  
**ORIGIN:** China  
**TYPE:** 'Folk' sized steel-string cutaway electro acoustic  
**TOP:** Solid spruce  
**BACK/SIDES:** Laminated rosewood  
**MAX RIM DEPTH:** 110mm (tapering to 90mm)  
**MAX BODY WIDTH:** 380mm  
**NECK:** Nato  
**SCALE LENGTH:** 635mm (25")  
**TUNERS:** Individual die-cast chrome  
**NUT/WIDTH:** Urea/43.48mm (37mm)  
**FINGERBOARD:** Bound rosewood, dot inlays, 400mm (15.75") radius  
**FRETS:** 20, small  
**BRIDGE/SPACING:** Rosewood w/ compensated urea saddle/50mm  
**ELECTRICS:** Yamaha SRT under-saddle pickup w/ System 66 preamp featuring volume, low, mid, high plus AMF (80-10kHz) small rotary controls, tuner on/off  
**WEIGHT (kg/lb):** 2.06/4.5  
**OPTIONS:** Acoustic FS830 (£360)  
**RANGE OPTIONS:** Other FS models are the FS800 (£268), FS820 (£305) and the FS850 (£398). Other electro cutaway models are the FSX800C (£370) and the FSX820C (£462)  
**LEFT-HANDERS:** No, only the FG820L (£351)  
**FINISHES:** Natural (as reviewed), Tobacco Brown Sunburst, Autumn Burst – gloss body with satin neck

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**PROS** A potentially superb, small-body electro cutaway, let down by...

**CONS** ...cramped bridge spacing, rather piezo-y plugged in voice and 'small-handed, beginner's' aim