

REVIEW ACOUSTIC GUITAR
VINTAGE GORDON GILTRAP SIGNATURE 12

VINTAGE GORDON GILTRAP SIGNATURE 12

PRICE
£499

Take a top player, a highly regarded luthier and a respected manufacturer and this guitar is the result. Louis Thorne samples a signature 12-string

The eclectic music of English guitarist Gordon Giltrap has been a staple of the British folk/rock scene since the late '60s. The brand-new signature electro-acoustic you see here, manufactured in China by Vintage, is modelled on one of Gordon's bespoke instruments, made by Coventry-based luthier Rob Armstrong. This is a man who has also built instruments for George Harrison and Bert Jansch, and the VE2000GG features Armstrong's distinctive pinched waist and slim headstock. With a solid cedar top and a smart preamp, it earns Mr Giltrap's wholehearted seal of approval, in both its 6- and 12-string incarnations: as he says, "I am proud to put my name to this guitar."

Body & Neck

Aside from their complement of strings, the specifications of both Gordon Giltrap signature guitars are essentially the same. The VE2000GG-12 has a high-grade solid North American red cedar top. The body is broadly OM-like in proportions but with slimmer shoulders, a slightly broader lower bout and a much more pronounced waist. Laminated mahogany is used for the back and sides, in keeping with the original Armstrong instrument, and once again it appears as though some high quality wood has been employed.

Neat wood binding delineates the boundary between the guitar's top and sides while its back features some equally well



This is an easy playing 12-string

OUR IMPRESSION IS OF A SMART LOOKING GUITAR THAT ISN'T TRYING TO BE FLASHY

executed purfling running down the centre. Similar cosmetics adorn the guitar's soundhole and the overall impression here is of a smart looking instrument that is not trying to be flashy.

This feeling is enhanced by Vintage's use of an all-over clear satin finish which certainly leaves things feeling woody and inviting, although it is likely that heavy playing will leave its mark in time. A look inside the guitar's soundhole reveals some neat scalloped bracing and very tidy



The Fishman preamp performs well

innards overall, along with a label displaying Gordon Giltrap's name. This is the only place that it is to be found on this guitar, incidentally, which is worthy of note for those guitarists who wouldn't normally wish to own an instrument with another player's name all over it.

The VE2000GG-12's neck is a necessarily chunky bit of mahogany, built to withstand the extra tension of this guitar's dozen strings. That said, in acoustic guitar terms, it is very far from being unwieldy and part of its feeling of size stems from the fingerboard's extra width, compared to that of a 6-string instrument. The neck has been given a soft C profile and the same satin finish as the rest of the guitar and is affixed to the body via a fairly slim heel.

Twenty medium frets populate the guitar's rosewood fingerboard, which has been very attractively adorned with some subtle abalone position dots and an inlay at the

twelfth fret. The frets themselves have all been very nicely finished and, coupled with the guitar's well cut nut, make for a very pleasant playing experience.

The slim, elongated headstock is a signature Armstrong design and here it is heavily laden with 12 gold Grover tuners and garnished with a rosewood veneer, which is also home to an abalone Vintage logo and a wooden truss rod cover with Rob Armstrong's 'A' logo. At the other end is a rosewood bridge with a compensated saddle made from the same GraphTech 'NuBone' material as the nut.

As has already been hinted at, the review guitar's setup is very good and, with an action of just under 3mm on the bass side, this guitar manages to be as playable as a 6-string while remaining mercifully free of buzzing notes higher up the fingerboard.

Electronics

The VE2000GG-12 is fitted with a Fishman Presys preamp and Sonicore pickup. Brand names aside, this is one of the company's more advanced OEM units and features an undersaddle piezo pickup and an internal microphone. The preamp has knobs for volume, three bands of EQ, mic blend and a feedback-fighting notch filter, along with buttons for activating the tuner and switching the phase.

A discrete LED display allows for chromatic tuning and the whole unit flips up to reveal the obligatory 9V battery housed on its underside.





VINTAGE VE2000GG-12

Price: £499
Built in: China
Scale length: 642 mm (25.27 inches)
Nut width: 47mm (1.85 inches)
Top: Solid cedar
Back & sides: Mahogany laminate
Neck: Mahogany
Fingerboard: Rosewood
Frets: 20 medium
Bridge: Rosewood with compensated NuBone saddle
Machineheads: Grover 102 tuners, gold
Weight: 2.4kg (5.25lb)
Finishes: Clear satin
Case: Kinsman hardshell case included
Left-handers: No
Options: 6-string version (VE2000GG) £479

CONTACT DETAILS

John Hornby Skewes & Co Ltd
www.jhs.co.uk

GB VERDICT

GOLD STARS

- ★ Original looks and design
- ★ Impressive build and playability
- ★ Great sounds

BLACK MARKS

- None at this price

IDEAL FOR...

Those after a posh 12-string with distinctive looks at a very reasonable price

GB RATING



This method helps to keep the preamp's footprint down to a pleasantly small size and makes changing the battery a doddle. The internal microphone is also built into the preamp assembly.

Sounds

Attacking this guitar with a medium plectrum reveals an immediately inviting chime that begs further playing. With a scale length of 25.27 inches, the VE2000GG-12 is a little more OM than 000 and this longer scale should perhaps lend it a bit of extra zing to the relatively softer tones imparted by its cedar top.

This would certainly seem to be the case, since the review guitar possesses a well balanced sound that seems to have a good mixture of sweetness and sparkle, with open chords managing not to sound brash even under hard strumming. This is a dynamic guitar, capable of some impressive volume, and this is largely maintained as chord shapes ascend the fingerboard.



The frets have been nicely finished

The compensated saddle certainly seems to be doing its job since the intonation is good, right up to the dusty end of the fingerboard, and the overall acoustic sound of this guitar is very impressive. Plug it in and everything is much as one would expect, with the Fishman transducer doing a good job of reproducing the guitar's acoustic sound, albeit in a typically 'piezo-y' way. Blending in a little of the microphone signal does a great job of taming the inevitable 'quack' of the pickup's sound, however, and this is a welcome feature that seems very much in keeping with this guitar's above average station.

However, adding the mic signal does have the effect of making the top very sensitive to brushes or scrapes from the picking hand, which, depending on your playing style, may or may not be welcome. The preamp's phase button and notch filter prove to be invaluable in the battle against feedback at higher volumes, although we can report that this guitar does seem to be pretty resistant to the dreaded



The dozen tuners are gold-plated

squeals. Suffice it to say that the electronics in this guitar are rather superior to your run-of-the-mill undersaddle transducer and through a dedicated acoustic amp, the VE2000GG-12 performs admirably.

Conclusion

Whether you know Gordon Giltrap's playing or not, the endorsement of this top player is not to be sniffed at. Borrowing from Giltrap's Armstrong-built acoustics, the VE2000GG-12 nevertheless keeps its signature status relatively low key and we can be sure that this is an instrument that Giltrap is genuinely pleased with and one that he plays. This guitar has been made to a very high standard and, in true Vintage style, is very far from being expensive. Unless you are conservative enough to be put off by its looks, then the VE2000GG-12 has a great deal to recommend it to the prospective 12-string picker. A smart and unusual looking guitar which is easy to play and sounds just as it should. **GB**



This is a classy yet understated guitar