

PATRICK JAMES EGGLE KANUGA £2,000
ACOUSTIC



PHOTOGRAPHY BY JESSE WILD



Patrick James Eggle Kanuga £2,000

Patrick Eggle swaps bespoke acoustics for an off-the-peg approach, will quality suffer? We find out... *by Jim Chapman*

By the very nature and limited resources of their businesses, most low-volume luthiers tend to operate within a custom-building environment, where each instrument is essentially a one-off, usually built to order. They may have a catalogue of defined body styles but detailed specifications will generally vary from one guitar to the next. One highly respected Brit acoustic maker bucking this status quo is Patrick Eggle who, in the couple of years since he returned from living and working in America, has been evolving a batch-production approach where the materials and cosmetics for each model are pre-specified. He's been able to do this – and simultaneously increase production – by investing in and training up additional staff, and is forecasting a healthy annual output of approximately 200 instruments. Apart from streamlining work in progress, one incidental advantage is that he can build for stock, something many other luthiers would dearly love to do but realistically can't.

You might be assuming that customising is now totally off Eggle's agenda. Not so: various options can be requested, but inevitably they'll be extras on top of the standard charges. Not that standard pricing should imply minimalist spec. As we'll see from

this Kanuga dreadnought, you'll be buying a very high-grade, handsomely trimmed instrument without any premium.

No clone

With its distinctive round or 'slope' shoulders, the Kanuga, introduced last year, is clearly influenced by Gibson's 1930s Advanced Jumbo, but the guitar is very much an Eggle and no clone. "Yes, it is like a J-45 body shape," says Eggle, "but we didn't take one and draw round it as a template. It simply provided the inspiration and the means to offer an alternative to our square-shouldered Skyland model, which is the dreadnought."

Reference to the Skyland gives an example of pre-specifying for individual models. Where the Skyland has a spruce/mahogany body, the Kanuga employs a cedar top and rosewood back and sides. And you'll not see much better-quality timber. The warm-hued Canadian red cedar front has close, even graining and is richly cross-silked, while the straight-grained Indian rosewood looks top notch too. Adding to this presentational appeal is figured koa binding back and front, a tastefully simple abalone-inlaid soundhole rosette, and a superbly lustrous gloss finish done in UV-cured lacquer that Patrick started using last year in preference to

nitro-cellulose. It's enabled him to achieve even thinner finishes than with nitro – as thin as 0.2mm – but requires its own set of skills. "UV lacquer needs a lot of cutting back," says Eggle, "and it's a question of finding a balance between applying too much and ending up with an undesirably thick finish, and too little where there is a risk of rub-throughs. A lot comes down to the experience of the guy doing the spraying. It's quite a complex process, but worth it."

The Kanuga's finery isn't restricted to the body. The ebony fingerboard is unbound but it carries a three-ply coachlining just in from the edges that is continued, again inset slightly, around the perimeter of the ebony-overlaid peghead. Done in strips of white fibre and Australian bloodwood this is a

The Rivals

Patrick James
Eggle Kanuga

The **Gibson Advanced Jumbo** (c£2,500) is based on the company's first 1936 slope-shoulder dreadnought and has the original's rosewood back and sides and diamond/arrowhead position markers. It comes in vintage sunburst or antique natural. The J-45-inspired **Santa Cruz Vintage Jumbo** (£2,999) is spruce/mahogany, dressed in vintage sunburst and includes open-back Waverly-style tuners. The **Martin CEO-4R** (£2,149) is a special-edition J-type – again deeply sunburst – with a body of Adirondack spruce and rosewood. Fingerboard and bridge are black micarta.



The Kanuga's bridge is made from Tusq, as all PJE bridges soon will be

PATRICK JAMES EGGLE KANUGA £2,000
ACOUSTIC

recent upgrade to the standard cosmetics, aimed at endowing a bound look without requiring customers to fork out a premium for full neck binding. It's an elegant solution, though of course you can still see the frets' tang ends. If that offends – though we frankly can't see why it should – allow an extra £200 to have the fretboard conventionally bound.

The headstock has also recently been revamped. It still has the distinctive bite-out-of-it visual device that Eggle continues to use on his Saluda small jumbo, but it's more compact, tapering towards the crown where the Saluda's flares out. Headstocks are tricky to get right, but this one looks a great success, balancing well physically and aesthetically against the rest of the instrument and set off a treat by the chrome, black-buttoned tuners and elaborate pearl logo. Patrick is now using the new design on the Skyland dreadnought and Linville OM too, which both previously carried traditional spade pegheads.

Talking of changes, something that will go largely unnoticed is that the Kanuga's nut and saddle are Tusq, not bone as was the case until a few months ago. So why's that? "It's increasingly difficult these days to get hold of consistently good quality bone that doesn't have pores in it or weak points," Eggle says, adding his belief that Graph Tech's Tusq also provides a more clearly defined sound for use with under-saddle transducers. Most Eggle models are now Tusq-equipped, and all will be in due course.

Cosmetics aside, our sample's only arguable practical omission – and this applies to all models unless they're fitted with an optional electro system – is the absence of a bottom strap button. "This is a very small job that can be carried out by any competent guitar tech, and we'll fit one by request at no extra charge," affirms Eggle. "The reason we don't fit them as standard any more is partly that some of our customers prefer not to have one, and also that it can make it more complicated to drill a 15/32-inch straight hole for an endpin jack if the tapered hole is already there."

The Kanuga's one-piece mahogany neck, secured by Eggle's usual Collings-style bolting system and using the 44.5mm nut width that is



The PJE-branded Gotoh tuners complete what is a classy-looking headstock

The whole sound is immensely appealing and, as expected of the genre, really packs a punch when you ask it to

standard on all but one of his models, is a great player. Its semi-wide format accommodates airy, precise fingerstyle, yet the span isn't so broad as to deter those used to slimmer strummers. A comfortable grip is maintained by the moderate-depth profile and a slick low-gloss finish, while the gentle fingerboard camber allows a speedy, low, buzz-free action. The standard of fretting, it almost seems needless to say, is absolutely immaculate.

Sounds

Many acoustic players regard cedar/rosewood as one of the optimum timber combinations, the former supplying fast dynamics and a mellow tonal follow-through, the latter lending depth, a fulsome bite and projection. The partnership here lives up to the theory and works a treat. Underlying the initial open, gently sparkling response is a smoothly tailored warmth and richness, itself underpinned by an impressively thrummy yet well controlled bottom end that adds a typical rosewoody front-end snap when you really dig in. The whole sound is immensely appealing and mature and, as expected of the dreadnought genre, really packs a punch when you ask it to. It can also be a sensitively lyrical picker when played in gentler fashion. Excellent.

Verdict

Unless you harbour a desire to have a maker personalise your instrument from the outset, there is simply nothing that can reasonably disappoint on this off-the-shelf Eggle. Even that 'missing' strap button can be sorted, no charge. Workmanship is first rate, all the cosmetic trim is tastefully considered, beautifully integrated and far from parsimonious, and the guitar performs in spades, in terms of handling and sound. With this in mind, the asking price is disarmingly reasonable – in Patrick Eggle's new pre-specified scheme of things, it's a pro-market bargain in fact. **G**

The bottom line

We like: Everything – build, cosmetic and slope-shoulder elegance, sound... you name it

We dislike: Save for no bottom strap button – which you can request at no extra cost – nothing

Guitarist says: Patrick James Eggle continues his ascent to the very top branches of the acoustic guitar-making tree. The Kanuga's combination of build, sound and playability makes it a simply outstanding instrument.



Patrick James Eggle Kanuga

PRICE: £2,000 (inc case)

ORIGIN: UK

TYPE: Slope-shoulder dreadnought acoustic

TOP: Solid cedar

BACK/SIDES: Solid rosewood

MAX RIM DEPTH: 123mm

MAX BODY WIDTH: 407mm

NECK: Mahogany

SCALE LENGTH: 645mm

TUNERS: PJE-branded chrome diecast

Gotohs with black buttons

NUT/WIDTH: Tusq/44.5mm

FINGERBOARD: Unbound ebony with pearl slotted-square markers, 406mm radius

FRETS: 20, thin

BRIDGE/SPACING: Ebony with Tusq saddle/55mm

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 1.93/4.25

RANGE OPTIONS: Other PJE models include the spruce/mahogany square-shoulder Skyland dreadnought (£2,400), the spruce/maple Saluda small jumbo (£2,500), cedar/rosewood Saluda Cutaway (£2,500), spruce/rosewood Etowah 12-fret 000 (£2,300) and spruce/mahogany Linville OM (£2,000). Prices include case

LEFT-HANDERS: Yes, no extra cost

FINISH: Gloss natural body, low-gloss neck

PJE Guitars 01691 661777

www.eggle.co.uk

Test results

Build quality ★★★★★
Playability ★★★★★
Sound ★★★★★
Value for money ★★★★★

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★