

YES YOU KAN

GBINFO



PATRICK JAMES EGGLE KANUGA
PRICE: £2,299
BUILT IN: UK
SCALE LENGTH: 645mm (25.4 inches)
NUT WIDTH: 44.5mm (1.75 inches)
STRING SPACING AT NUT: 37.5mm (1.48 inches)
TOP: Solid cedar
BACK & SIDES: Solid mahogany
NECK: Mahogany, bolt-on
FINGERBOARD: Ebony
FRETS: 20 vintage-style
BRIDGE: Ebony
STRING SPACING AT BRIDGE: 55mm (2.16 inches)
ELECTRONICS: Optional
MACHINEHEADS: Waverly open-gear, nickel
FINISHES: Natural gloss, UV cured
OPTIONS: Many available, please see website for details
CASE: Hiscox hard case included
LEFT-HANDERS: To order, no extra cost
CONTACT: Patrick James Eggle Guitars
 Phone: 01691 661777
 Web: www.eggle.co.uk

THOUGHT CEDAR AND MAHOGANY WERE 'LESSER' TONEWOODS THAN SPRUCE AND ROSEWOOD? **MICK TAYLOR** FINDS AN IDEAL REASON FOR YOU TO THINK AGAIN

Since his move back to Blighty from the USA in 2005, Patrick Eggle has been establishing a new workshop in Oswestry, Shropshire. We've seen examples of Patrick's custom-order work in the last year or so with the Saluda and Maple Leaf models, both sumptuously appointed beauties.

Now with a small, dedicated team, the UK facility will roll into 2007 ready to build a range of top-flight flattops on a specialised production line basis. Here we have Patrick's 'Kanuga' model, named after a lake in North Carolina, and inspired by the classic, slope-shouldered Gibson Jumbo design. With a longer scale length and other refinements to that seminal shape, it's a highly individual instrument which is about to become part of PJE's standard range (albeit here with mahogany, instead of the standard rosewood back and sides). Starting at £1,999 before upgrades, that sounds like a tempting prospect for anyone on the lookout for a high-end, handmade flattop. So let's have a closer look.

BODY & NECK

There's something so warming and evocative about the slope-shoulder Jumbo shape. Originally it was Gibson's 1934 response to Martin's

groundbreaking Dreadnought design, and is best known in its sunburst form, particularly the J-45 which is still a hugely popular guitar in Gibson's catalogue to this day. Here, this modern take on the theme eschews the 'burst in favour of a natural gloss finish, beneath which is a solid cedar soundboard. As we've seen recently in guitars from Taylor (GSMC, GB62) and Breedlove (Custom Shop Balance Walnut, GB64), cedar is often an instantly likeable tonewood right from the off, where the more common spruce-topped guitar can take a little time to blossom. As a result, cedar finds a lot of fingerpicking friends, thanks to its more sensitive dynamic range than spruce, for players with a lighter touch. These are generalisations of course, but assuming the same guitars and bracing patterns, it certainly seems to be the case.

The Kanuga has solid mahogany back and sides, which is great to see here nearer its more natural colour. Many people assume mahogany is a dark brown wood because it's often stained or covered in tinted lacquer. In fact, mahogany is commonly pale brown in colour. A lot of people regard mahogany as rosewood's poor cousin, simply because acoustic tradition has placed mahogany-bodied guitars at the more entry-level end of the price

spectrum for most companies. With quality tonewoods becoming ever more rare, plus 70+ years of flattop steel string acoustic guitar hindsight, more and more players are getting used to the idea that it's not a better/worse thing at all. Instead, it's a matter of personal tonal and aesthetic preference. Mahogany tends to have more obviously strident mid-range frequencies, with less colourful low mids and bass than rosewood.

We've seen Patrick's guitars being built first-hand – just as we have many of the world's leading instruments – and it's fair to say that the care and overall quality is nothing less than first class. For example, a look and feel inside the Kanuga reveals skillfully scalloped braces and ultra-tidy struts and kerfing, which is exactly as you'd expect at this price. But that's not all: after they're fitted and shaped, the internals also get a very light, fine sanding just to make it all look that bit more 'finished'. While this doesn't do anything for the tone, it does demonstrate Patrick and co's fastidious approach to aesthetics and quality control.

This Kanuga model we have for review features a couple of upgrades over the 'standard' model. The first is the abalone soundhole rosette which you may be surprised to learn carries a surcharge of



HOW WE GOT HERE

FAMOUS NAME, BUT NO LONGER WITH ELECTRICS

■ The Patrick Eggle brand will doubtless be familiar to you, from the popular British electric guitars that bear his name.

However, this is a source of some confusion because Patrick Eggle, the man, is no longer associated with those instruments, following his exit from that company in 1994. Having left the world of electric guitars, Patrick now concentrates on his superb,



high-quality acoustic guitars, built in his custom facility in Oswestry, Shropshire.

around £100. It is in fact light-green curly abalam (laminated abalone) which sparkles against the relatively dark hue of the cedar top. This Kanuga also has solid koa body binding front and back which, depending on your point of view, is either an overly subtle extravagance, or the perfect way to underline the individuality and quality of your guitar. It's punctuated with fine black/white/black fibre purfling that outlines the soundboard, and there's no denying that it looks fabulously high-class, and is fitted and finished flawlessly.

Upholding the classy vibe is the perfect gloss finish that covers the entire body and top. PJE is one of the growing number of modern manufacturers using an ultraviolet-cure finish process. The protective finish is applied, then hardened almost instantly in a UV-light curing booth, then buffed as normal. It drastically reduces the finishing time (where you'd traditionally have to spray, air-dry and sand multiple coats of nitro-cellulose lacquer), enabling a thin, extremely durable gloss coat. The same finish is used on the neck, though sanded incredibly thinly, according to Eggle, and not buffed to gloss, which returns a comfortable, friction-free feel under your hand, and indeed it does.

The neck uses a bolt-on design in the vein of Collings guitars and last month's Breedloves; CNC machined to fit perfectly into the neck block, then secured with bolts without the need for glue. The fingerboard extension is glued to the top in traditional fashion, and proponents of this method would argue that it offers a

■ Something missing? Production guitars will of course have an endpin!



superior joint which is also easier to maintain/repair if the need arises. Also, the bodies and necks are finished separately, so there's no unsightly finish build-up around the edges of the heel.

The neck itself is a single piece of mahogany to include the headstock and heel, something that environmentalists might argue is wasteful (you need to remove a lot of wood from the neck blank). Most guitar builders, however, will tell you that it's the optimum choice for tone. To strengthen the potentially weak spot around the nut, the Kanuga has a volute, and the neck profile fattens out sharply to the full headstock width at the first possible opportunity, instead of gently flowing from neck to 'stock. If you have big hands, it might take a week or two to grow accustomed to that.

Straight out of the case with a medium-to-low action, it's clear the Kanuga is a 'proper' guitar. 1¼ inches wide and 37.5mm string spacing at the nut is good for strumming or picking, and coupled with a decent amount of wood in your palm, it makes few

concessions to newbies. The action needs to be a certain height to get the strings ringing properly and the soundboard moving; here it's a good compromise of a modern feel and old school tone. You can lower or raise it of course, to suit your requirements. The fretting is simply sublime: thin, vintage-style frets fitted, profiled and polished exceptionally well.

The Kanuga's peghead is the modern classic 'sharp-edged' take on Martin's seminal design, imparting a precision-build feel. It's faced with ebony and finished and buffed to a high gloss, to show off the inlaid mother-of-pearl 'Patrick James Eggle' logo. Again, it's the little details that impress; the super tidy fine-line purfling, and the fact that all the hexagonal ferrule screws for the Waverly tuners are all lined up! In this case, those open-backed machines are finished with small ebony buttons to match the fingerboard, headplate and bridge.

The nut is bone, and sits at the end of the bound ebony fingerboard; two fine pinstripes set in black plastic continue from the headstock. It's

A BETTER BRACE

SHOW YOUR SUPPORT, MR EGGLE!

■ Essential to any acoustic guitar's tone is the top bracing. Too much and the guitar will be lifeless; not enough and it will lack physical strength.

With Patrick's guitars, the 'raw' braces themselves are made up en masse to a set spec and basic shape, including a bottom radius so they sit perfectly under the top of the guitars. Once selected and glued loosely on the guitar's soundboard, the whole thing then goes into a vacuum/suction machine that applies even

pressure to the whole of the top. It all sits on a shaped base during this process, which ensures that top and braces are glued with the right amount of curve.

When the glue is dry, the braces are then hand-shaped to define the guitar's tone. In the case of the Kanuga, Patrick tells us that the bass side is scalloped quite heavily for a loud, open and resonant bottom end, while the treble side isn't scalloped to keep those notes strong and defined.

DETAILS

PROOF POSITIVE THAT MAHOGANY AND CEDAR CAN SOUND BIG AND POWERFUL



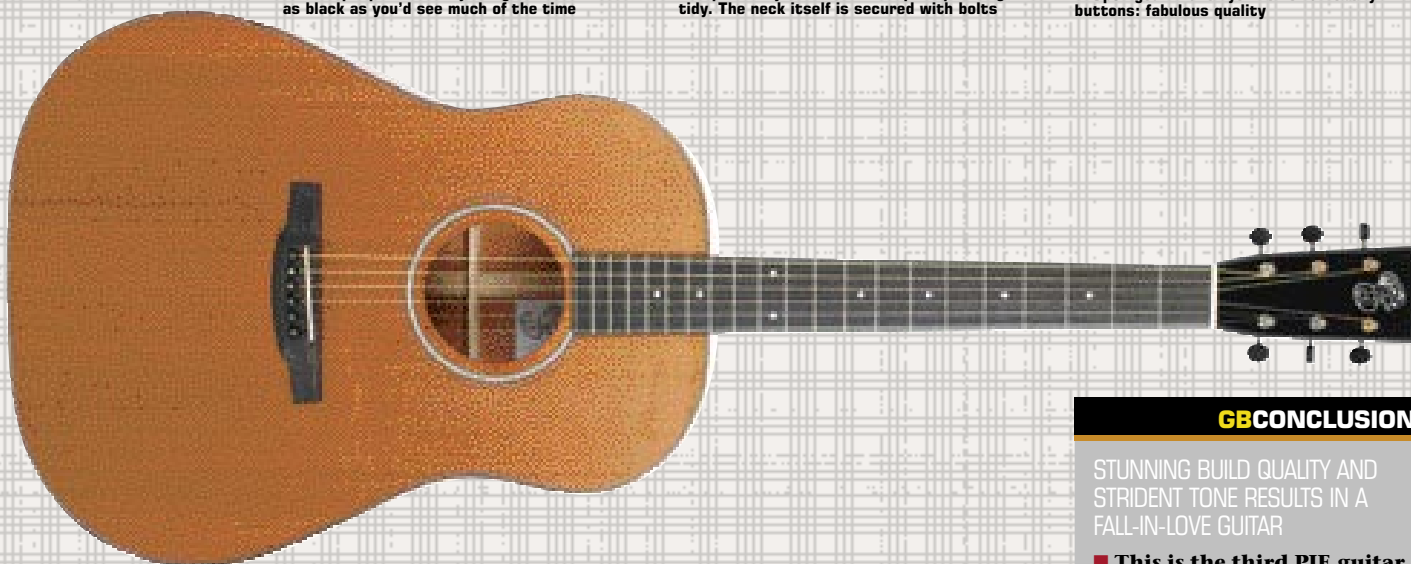
■ A simple pinned ebony bridge, albeit not as black as you'd see much of the time



■ A perfectly finished heel cap keeps things tidy. The neck itself is secured with bolts



■ Open gear Waverlys with small ebony buttons: fabulous quality



GBCONCLUSION

STUNNING BUILD QUALITY AND STRIDENT TONE RESULTS IN A FALL-IN-LOVE GUITAR

■ This is the third PJE guitar we've examined in close detail, cementing the view that Mr Eggle is right up there with his high-end contemporaries from across the pond.

Big volume, impressive note separation, buckets of sustain and resonance are all phrases you'd use with abandon when describing the Kanuga's tone, a result of its 25.4 scale length, build and materials choices – not necessarily what you'd expect of a Gibson J-45 or J-50, for example. In fact, this guitar has more in common with the likes of Collings for its strident, assertive tone, albeit for fingerpicking, and light to medium strumming and flatpicking. If you really attack your guitar, a spruce top may be a better option.

Value for money is such a subjective issue. Compared with other hand-built, high-quality acoustics the Patrick James Eggle Kanuga scores a straight five out of five. Compared with the very best stuff coming out of China, it's going to look expensive: obvious, but worth stating. Your wallet, hands and ears will no doubt make up your own mind for sure. **GB**

GBOPINION

PATRICK JAMES EGGLE KANUGA

GOLD STARS

- ★ Superb build quality
- ★ Lovely to play
- ★ Incredible tone

BLACK MARKS

- Nothing that's not purely subjective or aesthetic

IDEAL FOR...

Fingerstylists looking for a high-quality, hand-built friend for life

a subtle aesthetic touch which contributes to the Kanuga's high-class appeal without obviously doing so. The fingerboard has relatively simple slotted-diamond mother-of-pearl inlays, again flawless because they're CNC'd.

SOUNDS

The first thing that hits you square between the ears is the Kanuga's huge bass from the low E string. Strum and pick along for a while and the second surprise is that the impressive bottom end isn't at the expense of mids, trebles or note separation. In fact, the combination of the woods and lively, light build results in an incredibly vibrant, resonant guitar that has exceptionally good balance. That makes it a lovely picker, helped no end by the sensitive dynamics and warmth of the cedar top. The flip side of that is that while it's certainly sweet to strum with a light pick, the Kanuga doesn't have the characteristic warmth and togetherness of a J-45, perhaps as much down to the scale length as anything else. It's altogether more precise and piano-like, and encourages

your playing in that direction, rather than simply bashing out open chords. Indeed, played with your fingers or lightly with a pick, you find yourself drawn towards solo pieces that benefit from the Kanuga's ability to handle more complex chords and phrases. It can often be the case that bigger-bodied guitars suit strumming slightly better than fingerstyle, yet this jumbo has all the articulation, projection and dynamics to flatter anything from James Taylor to Tommy Emmanuel and beyond. It's an immensely satisfying guitar to listen to when played on its own, though you may well need to tame some of that bottom end if you're recording it in a full, modern band environment.

GBRATINGS

PATRICK JAMES EGGLE KANUGA

BODY & NECK	★★★★★
ELECTRONICS	N/A
PLAYABILITY	★★★★★
SOUNDS	★★★★★
VALUE FOR MONEY	★★★★☆
GBVERDICT	★★★★★