

## SPECIFICATIONS

**Model:** Saluda  
**Price:** £2499  
**Manufacturer:** Patrick James Eggle Guitars Ltd  
**Body Size:** Small Jumbo (16ins)  
**Made In:** UK  
**Top:** Flamed redwood (sequoia)  
**Back & Sides:** Mahogany  
**Neck:** Mahogany  
**Fingerboard:** Ebony  
**Frets:** 20  
**Tuners:** Gotoh  
**Nut Width:** 1.75ins  
**Scale Length:** 25.4ins  
**Electronics:** None  
**Strings Fitted:** Thomastik Infeld Spectrum Bronze 12/54  
**Left Handers?:** Available at no extra charge  
**Gig Bag/Case:** Hiscox

Patrick James Eggle Guitars  
 T: 01691 661 777  
 www.eggle.co.uk

# Patrick James Eggle Saluda

2007 sees a welcome return from Patrick Eggle - one of the UK's finest luthiers. Huw Price reports on one of PJE's launch models; the Saluda.

Patrick James Eggle is a member of a very exclusive club – British luthiers with an international reputation. He was once a struggling independent builder offering a range of self designed electrics, until a distributor who was looking to establish a big time guitar brand approached him.

The company that they founded carried the Eggle name, but the man himself never owned more than 15% of the shares. As the company lurched from financial crisis to financial crisis, he saw his shareholding diminish to almost nothing. By then Eggle felt like he was spending more time in the boardroom than the workshop. Eventually he decided to get back to what he loved doing most, namely building guitars.

For a couple of years Eggle returned to repair and maintenance work before he re-established himself as an archtop and flat-top guitar maker and relocated to North Carolina. Initially his flat-top designs were based on classic Martin models, but an encounter with American guitar dealer extraordinaire, George Gruhn, proved to be a pivotal event.

Eggle was hoping to persuade Gruhn to stock his guitars but he was told in no uncertain terms: 'why would I need yet another Martin clone when I can sell Martins all day long?' Gruhn suggested that Eggle should set about developing his own model range. Fast forward to 2006 and the Patrick James Eggle line includes six models, and yes, you can buy them in George Gruhn's Nashville guitar store.

Eggle has since returned to the UK where he has opened a new production facility in Oswestry. At present Eggle still gets his own hands dirty because he only has two employees, but despite the small scale of the operation, the company is also forward thinking and progressive.

Although the bodies and necks are hand finished, CNC routing is used to cut the neck, both the neck and end blocks as well as the bridges. Obviously far greater consistency and accuracy is possible using CNC technology rather than hand tools. This is essential because Eggle uses a hybrid neck joint. The joint itself is actually a traditional dovetail but Eggle asserts that the

new finish took some getting used to. Eggle was grateful for the help that US luthier James Olsen gave him and he eventually adapted his techniques to this new material. He also claims that this new finish is harder wearing than cellulose, it buffs up superbly and, most important of all, it can be applied very thinly. According to Eggle, most cellulose finishes are around 0.21mm thick; this stuff ends up a mere 0.15mm thick.

Eggle also took Gruhn's advice and embarked on a lengthy process of experimentation where he tried various radical design concepts, including an 'A' frame bracing system. Although he was able to produce some interesting and fine sounding guitars, he eventually concluded that there was no point in trying to reinvent the wheel. So the bracing patterns throughout the current Eggle range are all based on the classic Martin 'X'. In this case with a scallop on the bass side but not the treble.

However the styling and the body shapes are, at least on some of the models, quite different. The Saluda we are reviewing here is described

*“Eggle has succeeded in creating massive depth without the bass end becoming woolly and indistinct.”*

mating surfaces are so accurately cut that there's maximum wood to wood contact and it's an extremely tight joint even without glue. Nevertheless two bolts are used instead of glue to hold everything in place, and they visibly protrude through the neck block. Eggle isn't embarrassed about using neck bolts so he sees no reason to conceal them.

The fretboard tongue is then glued down onto three 8mm wide strips of bare wood on the soundboard, that are masked off when the finish is being applied. The body and neck are sprayed separately and the tightness of the neck joint is as good as it gets. I couldn't see any gaps along the edge of the one piece heel.

The finish that Eggle chooses is interesting. On a hand built £2500 guitar most of us would expect nitrocellulose lacquer. This is certainly the stuff that he used until very recently, when another magazine commented on the 'sticky' neck of an Eggle guitar they were reviewing. This got Eggle thinking, so he decided to try a new UV cured polyester finish that Bob Taylor had developed with the US finishing products manufacturer McFadden. It wasn't an easy option because this

as a 'Small Jumbo'. Some production changes are about to be made at the workshop and by March next year all the models will be pre-specified with standardised timber combinations. Eggle will still take custom orders but the regular Saluda model will have figured maple back and sides with a spruce top and 'falling maple leaf' fingerboard inlays in pearl and abalone.

The Saluda that we're reviewing is a very different beast. The back, sides and neck are made from 'genuine' mahogany, which Eggle believes comes from Brazil or Honduras. But the defining feature of this guitar is the stunningly figured redwood top. This Sequoia Sempervivens is rare stuff indeed because Californian redwood trees are now protected and you're no longer allowed to chop them down. So the stuff Eggle uses is old growth timber, much of which is reclaimed from nineteenth-century buildings.

The grain pattern is stunning, and since this isn't spruce or cedar the usual 'standards' of straight grain and evenness of colour don't apply. The grain is pretty tight at the centre and it widens out towards the edges of the lower bout. The grain runs reasonably straight, thick lines of cross silking



*“It’s utterly flawless, yet it feels like a hand made guitar. That’s because it is, and you’ll be aware that it’s got soul from the moment you open the case.”*



*“Just picking up this Saluda is promising because the body starts ringing with just the slightest tap.”*



create a 'V' pattern. Although the finish is apparently wafer thin, it looks incredibly deep and the high gloss adds a three dimensional quality to the grain that ripples and changes as light hits it from various angles.

The 'V' shape is tastefully echoed on the rear as the straight grain of the back plates join at an angle. The mahogany is quite light in colour and there's not much figuring. But that can be fairly typical of the South American mahogany that's commonly used for guitars, and this only serves to highlight the top.

The Saluda's headstock is an original Eggle shape with an asymmetrical cutout. Although it's fairly large, it looks visually balanced with the body and the radius of the curves echo the body curves in a pleasing way. The front is capped with ebony, a theme that continues with the ebony buttoned Gotoh tuners, the bridge and the fantastic quality fingerboard. Even the body binding and the heel cap are ebony with super thin white pinstriping. Decoration levels are low. There's a

*“... this guitar's sustain with its even and smooth decay is one of its most impressive qualities.”*

fairly ornate pearl inlaid 'Patrick James Eggle' logo on the headstock that rivals the Santa Cruz logo for illegibility. A hint of neo-classical abalone inlay at the twelfth fret provides the only position marking you'll find on the fingerboard and there's a slim band of abalone at the centre of the rosette. Fortunately, the white side marker dots show up well against the ebony board, so you shouldn't get too lost.

I'd describe the neck as a proper acoustic neck. It's substantial without being club-like, but it's fast enough to get around the fingerboard with ease and barre chords are comfortable and easy to hold down. The back also seems fairly loose, a characteristic I have noticed with many vintage acoustics.

Tap the lower bout area with the fleshy tip of your finger and you will feel the wood kick back. The middle part of the back produces a strong tap tone and the area nearest the neck produces a third clear note. In contrast the top seems stiffer but there's still a reassuringly clean tap tone around the bridge area.

All this resonance pays dividends when you set the strings in motion and the Saluda comes to life. The first quality that struck me was balance. There's no boominess, no scooped midrange and no excessive treble, but don't mistake that for a lack of character. The low end sounds massive and authoritative, with all the depth you might expect from rosewood. However this Saluda doesn't have the snap and

tightness that characterises decent rosewood guitars. The explanation is simple and obvious, it's mahogany not rosewood.

Consequently there are fewer upper harmonics to the wound strings so you hear more of the fundamental note. This is no bad thing, and the resulting warmth and woodiness of the mahogany tone is a big reason why some players prefer it. Many sound engineers prefer it too because the directness of mahogany guitars can be easier to record and slot into a dense mix.

But the Saluda is remarkable because Eggle has succeeded in creating massive depth without the bass end becoming woolly and indistinct. The low notes have strong definition and they're also quick to respond with an enthusiastic punchiness.

Redwood is generally considered to sound similar to cedar, with perhaps a touch more treble. When flatpicking, the high frequency response of the Saluda is extremely dependent on the type of plectrum you're using. With a medium/heavy pick the treble is very slightly recessed but the midrange and bass really thump. Imagine the Gibson-esque spruce/mahogany sound that you've probably heard on countless rock and country recordings, and you'll be in the ballpark.

However, swapping over to a thinner pick dramatically changes the Saluda's tonal response. The bass and mids become a little less pugilistic and the treble opens out considerably. Immediately there is an ethereal airiness to the sound and an extra degree of transparency through the midrange. The bass remains strong but it's more touch-sensitive and dynamically responsive.

So far this is impressive stuff because the Saluda has demonstrated its ability to handle the boom-chugga stuff as well as chiming open chords that combine fretted notes with open strings. But there's more to come. With 38mm at the nut and 55mm at the bridge, the generous string spacing is obviously suited to fingerpicking and there's plenty of fingerboard width. So on with the thumbpick and let's see what it can do,

The Saluda is very easy to fingerpick because the inherent balance helps to even things out, even if your technique is a bit sloppy. It's simultaneously loud but mellow with impressive note separation. The high strings are clear and bright but they are bolstered with body and weight. The bass notes do that soft bassline/kick drum thing if you palm mute. So you can get a very refined Merle Travis vibe going or even rural blues and ragtime styles.

But to hear the full glory of the Saluda, you need to let those bass notes sustain. In fact, this guitar's sustain with its even and smooth decay is one of its most impressive qualities. It's certainly inspiring to hear the woody tone of the low E and A strings grumbling away under folky fingerstyle excursions.

Our Saluda played easily enough with its medium action and 12 gauge strings, and thanks to the flat-ish saddle radius I was able to move onto

## Review.

bottleneck without any trouble. Once again the Saluda delivered the goods in an unexpectedly authentic manner, demonstrating that it can do the dirty as well as the posh stuff. Dropping down to DADGAD produced similarly impressive results but the limitations of the mahogany body became apparent when I took things down to CGDGAD. With the fitted strings, the lowest notes slightly ran out of puff.

However I think it's fair to say that this model succeeds as a fine all-round guitar. What's more, it demonstrates just how versatile and effective this body shape and size can be. This is worth mentioning because at 16", the Saluda is almost exactly the same width as Taylor's new mini Jumbo, the GS. The depth and length are virtually identical too. With the exception of Taylor's maple/spruce GS, the Saluda makes the rest of the GS range seem a bit brash and unrealised.

So can I think of anything to criticise? There are a couple of issues that are probably more personal than practical. Besides the changes that various plectrum gauges can bring to the party, I didn't find that the Saluda offered outstanding tonal variation. I like to hear big changes between playing near the neck and playing near the bridge, almost as if I'm swapping between pickups on an electric guitar. The Saluda didn't really deviate from one basic tone, although that tone was fairly wonderful. This is also a big bodied guitar and it responds best to a firm touch. Then again I'd expect the dynamics and sonic breadth to improve over time. I would also make a personal observation about the finish

*‘... this guitar offers something special in these days of mass produced clinical excellence. It's utterly flawless, yet it feels like a hand made guitar.’*

on the neck. It's as smooth as glass and it makes the wood look fantastic, but I don't like the way it feels. My personal preference is for cellulose lacquer, or the sensation of bare wood on a well played vintage guitar. That's because these things make me feel more physically and emotionally connected to an instrument. Without wishing to appear vulgar, I found the finish on the Saluda's neck to have a certain 'prophylactic' quality.

But all things considered the Saluda presents the well heeled guitar buyer with a pleasurable dilemma. When you consider that most of the comparable 'big name' American factory-made guitars will cost you almost as much, or even more, the Saluda looks like a great deal. Also consider that those factory guitars will probably be made from lesser quality timbers and they'll be bound with plastic rather than solid woods.

More importantly, this guitar offers something special in these days of mass produced clinical excellence. It's utterly flawless, yet it feels like a hand made guitar. That's because it is, and you'll be aware that it's got soul from the moment you open the case. This Eggle is easily comparable to any of the top hand-built US guitars, but it's going to cost you far less. What's more, you can even call the workshop and ask for Patrick if you want to want to order a special guitar of your own.

### Huw Price

#### Acoustic Ratings

⊕⊕⊕⊕⊕ Exceptional  
⊕⊕⊕⊕⊕ Excellent  
⊕⊕⊕⊕⊕ Good  
⊕⊕⊕⊕⊕ Average  
⊕⊕⊕⊕⊕ Poor

#### ACOUSTIC RATINGS:

##### Build Quality ⊕⊕⊕⊕⊕

We can find nothing whatsoever to criticise about the construction or the finishing inside and out. Dangerously good!

##### Sound ⊕⊕⊕⊕⊕

At present this guitar likes to be played hard and we would like to hear a touch more tonal variety. But we're also certain that Father Time will work his magic over the next few years.

##### Playability ⊕⊕⊕⊕⊕

Great intonation and the immaculate frets are so highly polished they almost look like chrome. But the rolled over ends meant that I occasionally slipped off the board.

##### Value ⊕⊕⊕⊕⊕

Just compare the price of this top timbered hand built Brit with similarly spec'd Yanks and it looks like a great deal.

##### Wow Factor ⊕⊕⊕⊕⊕

The redwood top oozes charisma without being flashy and the detailing epitomises good taste.

