

Acoustic

FIRST TIMERS

You're looking for a great acoustic at a bargain price, but everyone says it's Mission Impossible. Ben James samples three entry-level acoustics and says: Oh, no it isn't...

So there's good news and bad. The good news is that construction techniques and presentation standards for entry-level instruments are better today than they've ever been. The bad news is that there's a potentially confusing array of brands and models to choose from. If you're thinking of buying your first acoustic and you're not sure where to start, we've scoured the market and come up with three cracking entry-level acoustics that each have something different to offer depending on your needs.

VINTAGE V400N

Vintage guitars are spec'd and distributed by John Hornby Skewes, one of the UK's largest musical instrument distributors. Their considerable clout in the marketplace has resulted in Vintage instruments being widely available throughout the country, while customers continue to benefit from excellent after-sales support.

The V400N is a 14 fret to the body dreadnought with a solid spruce top and a nato (sometimes referred to as Eastern mahogany) laminate back and sides. Nato has also been used for the shallow profile V-shaped neck. The curvy ebony bridge is home to a

compensated saddle and white dot-marked string pins. The top, back and neck are all finished with off-white coloured binding.

The simple, Martin-shaped headstock accommodates chrome tuners and the 'Vintage' logo. The nut is well fitted, which is evidence of a good standard of manufacturing. All too often it's areas such as the nut that let down entry-level instruments, but there are no such concerns here. The 20 medium-sized frets are also finished to a good standard, as is the rosewood fretboard.

A high gloss finish has been used throughout and the V400N certainly looks a smart, well-finished acoustic. A mock tortoiseshell pickguard and an uncomplicated soundhole rosette complement the all over binding, making for a well-presented guitar that doesn't look overdressed. If the natural finish (as reviewed) is not to your particular taste, the V400N comes in a rather funky 'trans blue', a Johnny Cash-like black or, for no additional cost, a sunburst finish.

When played, the V400N is well balanced and the setup is particularly good. The neck's slim profile makes for quite a fast-playing guitar and electric users will no doubt find it easy to migrate across to this particular acoustic.

Those new to guitar playing will particularly like some the extras

that come with this guitar such as a three-page (non-exhaustive) list of UK guitar tutors, a brochure containing a beginner's guide to an acoustic's anatomy, some starter lessons and a string-changing guide. They even throw in a replacement high E string and a pick!

SOUNDS

The V400N has a good overall timbre, slightly biased towards the bass register. 'Singalong' strummers will particularly like this tonal characteristic as it performs well accompanying a voice. The V400N's healthy sound projection fills a lounge or sitting room with ease and, although things get a little ragged when really pushed with a heavy pick (like most other acoustics within this price range), it's an capable all-round dreadnought.



VINTAGE V400N

PRICE: £139
BUILT IN: China
SCALE LENGTH: 642mm (25.3 inches)
NUT WIDTH: 44mm (1.7 inches)
TOP: Solid spruce
BACK & SIDES: Laminate nato
NECK: Nato
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood
FRETS: 20 medium
BRIDGE: Rosewood
STRING SPACING AT BRIDGE: 57mm (2.2 inches)
MACHINEHEADS: Enclosed gear, chrome
ELECTRICS: None
WEIGHT: 2.2kg (4.8lb)
LEFT-HANDERS: Yes, natural finish only
FINISH OPTIONS: Natural (shown), black, trans blue, sunburst
OPTIONS: V400MP (maple back & sides, £149), V400-12 (12-string, £159)
CONTACT: JHS & Co Ltd
PHONE: 0113 286 5381
WEB: www.jhs.co.uk

AGB RATINGS

VINTAGE V400N

Construction:

85%

Playability:

80%

Sound:

85%

Value For Money:

80%

Verdict:

82.50%