



Audition

We test the best of the rest
of the month's new gear

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DANELECTRO '59M SPRUCE

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Guitarists of a certain age may remember the original Dano model, but we suspect most will be familiar with the modern Far-Eastern repros that alter annually, constantly plundering the band's evocative, 'cheap and cheerful' past. Earlier this year, a trio of models included the Mosrite-inspired (er, copy) Danelectro '64 along with the DC59R electro-resonator. The third new model, like that reso, uses Dano's most recognisable double-cutaway 'shorthorn' shape, now known as the '59, that will forever be associated with Jimmy Page. And there's nothing wrong with that!

"Iconic, quirky and fun," says Danelectro of its current models, but at £629 this new '59M Spruce is hardly an impulse purchase – although 'street' prices do seem considerably lower – and with the standard '59M NOS shorthorn costing £499, what exactly are we getting here?

Part of the Danelectro recipe, of course, has been its semi-solid construction, despite what has mainly been a sealed, solidbody-looking body. The first obvious change to the '59M NOS is the slash-style soundhole, and, as the name implies, it's a spruce top instead of Masonite (hardboard). Dano's specs also state that the central frame is solid spruce instead of plywood – all aimed to create "authentic 1950's Danelectro tone", we're told.

But this and the current '59s use a recessed adjustable wrapover bridge, rather than the more rudimentary original-style Dano bridge with its rosewood saddle, or the more contemporary flat-plate bridges with their adjustable metal saddles.

Along with the 635mm (25-inch) maple bolt-on neck, we get a pair of '56 Lipstick single-coil pickups, as used on the current Convertible and '59MJ, with the classic twin-stacked volume and tone controls. Plus, there's the three-way switch, which, as ever, voices the two pickups in centre position in series, not the usual parallel, for a thicker and louder voice: the Dano secret.

Sounds

Extremely light in weight with a strap button position at the end of the long heel, effectively under the 15th fret, the '59M Spruce feels very at odds with a 'conventional' Strat, Tele or pretty much anything else we had to hand – as with the other shorthorns. The neck actually feels rather skinny in width, although it has a conventional 42.6mm nut width, while the full C profile has a modest depth of 20.1mm at the 1st fret and 22.3mm at the 12th. The rosewood fingerboard feels fairly flat with its 356mm (14-inch) radius and the frets are on the low side of medium.

In either solo pickup position we're met with a bright – maybe that should be very bright – lower-than-Strat output voice that takes a bit of a rethink with your amp/pedal setup. At the bridge, our classic rock Marshall-style setup sounds spiky with a vicious percussive attack that might get you a gig in a garage punk outfit but little else. The almost mid-placed 'neck' pickup fares little better and there's hum and microphony at stage levels. Changing over to a more classic Fender-like amp voice, however, adding a gain boost, lashings of

reverb and short slap-back and/or tremolo to taste and we're transported to a parallel roots/rockabilly world. Fantastic!

That 'secret' middle pickup position ups the output, but isn't as dark as you might expect: there's still plenty of those slightly microphonic highs that have a hint of old, early PAF. Pulling down either tone (unfortunately, most of the action happens right at the end of the pot's travel) and pulling the volumes back certainly sweetens the highs, and now our '59M sounds more in a Fender camp in terms of output level and tonal balance, despite its overall bass-light voice, yet still has that super-quick, percussive attack.

Exactly what the spruce element is adding is harder to define. There does seem to be a little more resonant 'woodiness' compared with our six-year-old or so single-cut Dano, but with its inherent steel-y bright attack, we'd suggest it's subtle.

Verdict

This is a tidily built guitar with retro appeal and sounds to match. While its solid wood spec goes some way to introducing a little more tonal depth, it's still quite a unique voice that not every player will get. That said, for percussive jangle it has a place and, as ever, makes for a rather good slide guitar. With some aggressive street pricing and a good colour choice, it certainly has character if you're looking to expand your collection with a different voice. **[DB]**

8/10