

VINTAGE VIATOR

*A Munchkin guitar from the wizards at Vintage
- David Mead is Acoustic's ramblin' man...*

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

MANUFACTURER: Vintage
MODEL: Viator
BODY SIZE: Travel
MADE IN: China
TOP: Sitka spruce
BACK AND SIDES: Sapele
NECK: Nato
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood
FRETS: 18
TUNERS: Grover open gear
NUT WIDTH: 43mm
SCALE LENGTH: 546mm
STRINGS FITTED: .012 - .052
LEFT HANDERS: No
GIG BAG/CASE INCLUDED: Padded gig bag

ACOUSTIC TEST RESULTS

PROS: A travel guitar with impeccable build qualities and a great sound
CONS: Just those tuning machines - a higher ratio would make for a smoother ride
OVERALL: A great little travelling companion, with a very musical voice and some serious good looks!

STAR RATINGS

SOUND QUALITY: ★★★★★
BUILD QUALITY: ★★★★★
VALUE FOR MONEY: ★★★★★

CONTACT DETAILS:

John Hornby Skewes
www.jhs.co.uk

Hot on the heels of Paul Brett's previous collaboration with Vintage that resulted in the excellent VE8000PB six- and 12-string models comes the VTR800PB Viator travel guitar - a tiny tyke of diminutive proportions that no self-respecting airline would dare refuse on board as hand luggage. But this scaled down mite is not to be taken lightly as it is capable of producing the sort of tone that will charm any seasoned globetrotter's socks off!

BUILD QUALITY

To begin with, I'll try and get things into perspective as I've no doubt that the Viator's exact proportions will not be fully appreciated from its photographs. Measuring in at approximately 835mm from tip to toe it barely reaches to my hip when we're stood side by side and yet every aspect of its body shape and general design renders it in perfect proportion. So much so, in fact, that it could be easily taken for a slightly smaller than usual parlour guitar. Paul tells me that his inspiration for the Viator's design was taken from instruments that were around at the beginning of the 20th Century and a little bit of a look around via Google images will confirm that lineage nicely. He also told me that "Viator" is Latin for "Traveller" - so this is already shaping up to be one thoroughly researched and very aptly named little instrument!

The soundboard is Sitka spruce with maple and rosewood for both the binding and soundhole rosette, both of which look exquisite and offer a dainty touch to the body. Back and sides are Sapele which has been matte finished with a rich chocolate coloured lacquer through which it's possible to see the contours of the wood grain. It's very attractive - I like it.

Nato is the choice for the Viator's neck with a distinctive pronounced V-shape contour. I asked Paul about the reasoning behind this and he told me that it was something found on early Stella parlour guitars, thought by many to be a very user-friendly shape to fit into the palm of the hand as well as being

good for children or beginners to - literally - get to grips with. Another nice touch at the base of the neck; the heel is capped with maple, offering yet more evidence of the amount of thought and finesse that has gone into the instrument's design and manufacture.

There's a rosewood veneer on the Viator's open headstock, which is itself flanked by Grover tuners - and it's rosewood again for the 12-fret to the body fingerboard. In general, the neck and fingerboard are the two elements of a travel guitar that have to be as close as possible to normal dimensions and this is true here. The NuBone nut is a familiar 43mm and, despite the very short 546mm scale length, the frets don't feel in any way too small or toy like in use.

At the other end of the string length we find a rosewood bridge with a Tusq string saddle and the bridge being set back at the point where the body is at its widest bodes well for both the tonal response and volume level that we can expect from this little chap.

SOUND QUALITY

The actual sound of the Viator is hard to categorise. It's certainly a lot sweeter and more rounded than I was expecting. I guess it would be fair to say that it has the tonal qualities that fall squarely between a mandolin and a banjo - with quite a surprising amount of volume thrown in for good measure. I've played plenty of travel guitars where the tone is lifeless and thin, but that's certainly not the case here.

One minute criticism is that it might have been a good idea to install some higher ratio tuners on the Viator as its short scale means that precise intonation can be slightly tricky, especially when experimenting with some drop tunings. It's a very minor thing to mention, though, and not of any great concern.

The guitar sounds great when played fingerstyle and holds its own nicely when played with a pick, but most of all, it's a





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fun instrument to play. I had some serious problems writing this review because I wanted to keep picking the Viator up to play it! And someone once told me that you can tell that you have a good instrument in your hands when it gives you a tune or two – and that’s certainly the case here. Compact and inspiring – a winning combination, surely?

CONCLUSION

The Viator comes in its own custom-made gig back with shoulder straps for the serious hiker and so it’s an eminently portable instrument for anyone on the move, whether you’re

off on a camping holiday in Cornwall or boarding a 747 for some adventures further afield. In either case you can do so in the full knowledge that you’re taking with you an instrument that feels great to play, is fun to spend time with sounds great into the bargain. At only £229 it’s not going to break the bank and I wouldn’t think twice about strapping on a pickup and using one live as its voice has the kind of charm that an audience couldn’t feasibly resist.

All in all, I think Paul and Vintage have come up with another winner – and I’m seriously thinking about adding one to this year’s letter to Santa without delay! ■