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# Audition

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

Photography Oilly Curtis



## VINTAGE PAUL BRETT STATESBORO 12-STRING

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**Utter** the word 'Statesboro' to your average blues nut and it'll conjure up memories of Duane Allman and Dickey Betts duelling on *At Fillmore East*. Of course, real Delta folk heads know that *Statesboro Blues* was first cut by Blind Willie McTell for the Victor label on 17 October 1928.

Which brings us to the new Vintage Paul Brett V5000SB-12 Statesboro 12-string electro-acoustic. The guitar is the latest result of a collaboration between respected 12-string artist Paul Brett and the Vintage brand. Based on the ancient Oscar Schmidt-built Stella acoustic played by Blind Willie himself, the Statesboro features a solid Spruce top and maple back joined together with mahogany sides and finished in Satin Antique Burst. The neck is mahogany too, and comes topped with a slice of rosewood with 18 thin vintage frets, 12 of which are clear of the body.

The satin finish nails the utilitarian vintage vibe beautifully and that aesthetic is further enhanced by the silk screen soundhole rosette, white binding and a maple headstock veneer flanked by old school tuners. The effect is slightly compromised by the Fishman REP-102 Rare Earth humbucking soundhole pickup. It's a bit like putting go-faster stripes on a Model T Ford. It just looks a little out of place. Wouldn't it be good if someone came up with a modern acoustic pickup that looked like a vintage DeArmond? Someone get on that...

What makes this instrument different to just about every other acoustic 12-string out there is the floating rosewood bridge – with a bone saddle to match the top nut – and the trapeze tailpiece. Here the strings are pushing down in the guitar's top, not pulling up.

### Sounds

Even before we took our first strum we were impressed by just how solid this guitar feels. Its compact parlour-esque body and wide yet comfortable neck feel robust enough to survive being thrown on and off of freight trains across the Deep South's hobo jungle. The Statesboro comes with a great tweed hard case so it'll at least be ok with being tossed around on the bus or in the back of your Ford Focus.

Though physically strong, it still needs a bit of TLC. Although you don't get any of the string tension pull on the bridge like you would on a regular acoustic 12-string, the Statesboro isn't designed to be run at concert pitch. As Mr Brett comments: "On my Statesboro, I use 0.011 – 0.050s tuned down a tone but with the bass pair dropped to C. If I used heavier strings I would only tune down to B, never to concert pitch to avoid damaging the guitar."

Following the man's advice we tuned down a tone. In that state, the guitar has a bright response with a staggering amount of projection. You can strum this thing, of course, but the biggest rewards come when you pick out some single notes, albeit using doubled strings. An ancient blues approach works best. Forget trying to mute all the strings. Letting some rogue notes ring out as you pick or attack the Statesboro with a bottleneck adds to the sense of Delta authenticity and drama. The string spacing feels quite tight at first but we found that became a real asset after a spell. Hitting the right strings quickly became second nature.

The Statesboro is available without the Fishman pickup at £549 but Brett picked a great unit for his latest model. The Rare Earth, which features a discrete onboard volume control, is respectful to the guitar's acoustic tone and, like us, you might enjoy adding some spooky reverb for some down at the crossroads fun at midnight. Turn your lights down low and soak up the atmosphere!

### Verdict

With the greatest respect to Mr Brett you don't need a PhD in the man's back catalogue to get a kick out of this guitar. What he and the Vintage brand have done is give us access to a species of 12-string acoustic guitar that few of us would be able to enjoy. Blues has become such a sterile medium over the past few years that it's good to remind yourself just how thrilling it can be when you beat it out on an old school acoustic. We look forward to the next trip to the drawing board for Vintage and Paul Brett. They'll do well to top the Statesboro. **[EM]**

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