

DUELLING DALTONS

ACOUSTIC GUITARS? YOU'VE NEVER HAD IT SO GOOD! PAUL ALCANTARA ADDS A COUPLE OF FINE FLATTOPS FROM HUSS & DALTON TO HIS WISH LIST

GBINFO



HUSS & DALTON CM CUSTOM

PRICE: £2,690 (as reviewed)
BUILT IN: USA
SCALE LENGTH: 645mm (25.4 inches)
NUT WIDTH: 44.5mm (1.75 inches)
STRING SPACING AT NUT: 38mm (1.5 inches)
TOP: Solid Engelmann spruce
BACK & SIDES: Solid Indian rosewood
NECK: Honduran mahogany
FINGERBOARD: Ebony, 406mm radius (16 inches)
FRETS: 20 medium
BRIDGE: Ebony
STRING SPACING AT BRIDGE: 56mm (2.2 inches)
MACHINEHEADS: Waverly 4060 tuners, nickel
FINISHES: Natural, catalysed urethane
WEIGHT: 1.8kg (4lbs)
CASE: TKL hardshell case included
LEFT-HANDERS: Yes, £211 up-charge
OPTIONS: Standard model with Gotoh tuners, no Brazilian rosewood peghead veneer & maple heel cap (£2,534); other custom options available

CONTACT:
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Acoustic guitar designs from the late 1920s and early 1930s continue to dominate the market, a fact that can be verified with a glance at the catalogue of almost any of the major US manufacturers. Herringbone-bound dreadnoughts, OMs, round-shouldered jumbos and 12-fret 000-size guitars abound. It is not without good reason that this period is widely considered the 'Golden Age' of flattop, mandolin and banjo design.

Having said that, we are experiencing a second 'Golden Age' of sorts right now. Building on the designs from the hallowed pre-war years, manufacturers like Collings, Santa Cruz and our very own Patrick James Eggle are producing guitars that compare favourably with the finest vintage instruments and are certainly superior to most of the 1970s guitars that are today touted as 'vintage'. Indeed, it could be argued that quality and consistency of manufacture have never been so good.

Based in Staunton, Virginia, Huss & Dalton is a relatively recent arrival on the scene. The company was founded in 1995 by Jeff Huss and Mark Dalton. "Our aim is to produce guitars that pay homage to tradition while incorporating improvements to structural design and cosmetics,"

GBINFO



HUSS & DALTON 000-SP CUSTOM

PRICE: £3,045 (as reviewed)
BUILT IN: USA
SCALE LENGTH: 632mm (24.9 inches)
NUT WIDTH: 46mm (1.8 inches)
STRING SPACING AT NUT: 40mm (1.6 inches)
TOP: Solid Sitka spruce
BACK & SIDES: Solid Indian rosewood
NECK: Honduran mahogany
FINGERBOARD: Ebony, 406mm radius (16 inches)
FRETS: 20 medium
BRIDGE: Ebony
STRING SPACING AT BRIDGE: 59mm (2.3 inches)
MACHINEHEADS: Waverly 3504 tuners with snakewood buttons, gold
FINISHES: Natural, catalysed urethane
WEIGHT: 1.6kg (3.5lbs)
CASE: TKL hardshell case included
LEFT HANDERS: Yes, £127 up-charge
OPTIONS: Standard model with nickel-plated Waverly tuners, ivoroid buttons & rosewood binding (£2,795); other custom options available

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CURVE BALL

WHEN IS A FLAT TOP NOT A FLAT TOP?

Both of these guitars feature a soundboard that curves outwards very slightly, adding strength as well as altering the tone.

"The tops of our guitars have a 25-foot radius," says Huss & Dalton's Jeff Hill. "The radius is milled into the scalloped braces which are then glued to the top while it is sitting on a concave surface with the same radius. Pressure is applied from above and once the glue is dry we remove the

top, flip it over and, presto – a curved or arched surface that increases the load bearing properties of the top and boosts the mid-range for a more balanced sound."



The 000-SP's pyramid bridge gets its name from the 'peaks' at either end



A series of lighter streaks run along the 000-SP's ebony 'board

"THE 000-SP OFFERS THE ULTIMATE BLEND OF TONAL BALANCE AND PLAYABILITY"

cosmetic – indeed, some luthiers prefer the 'woody' appearance seen here. Tiny pearl slotted-square position markers at the fifth, seventh and ninth frets reflect the model's understated yet elegant appearance. The frets, which overlap the koa binding, are immaculately installed, as is the neatly sculpted bone nut.

Faced with rosewood, the slotted headstock is fitted with a set of engraved three-on-a-strip, gorgeous gold-plated Waverly tuners, complete with snakewood buttons. While we are at this end of the guitar, it's nice to see that the headstock slots are cut deep enough to avoid contact with the first and sixth strings. A diamond-shaped volute to the rear of the nut is a decorative feature that harks back to the period when Martin guitars were fitted with a separate, spliced-on headstock (contemporary Martin style-28 guitars display a similar carving). Both the neck and the body are flawlessly finished in catalyzed urethane.

says the company's Jeff Hill. Below we take look at two very different Huss & Dalton flattops and consider how they shape up to the competition.

BODY & NECK – 000-SP CUSTOM

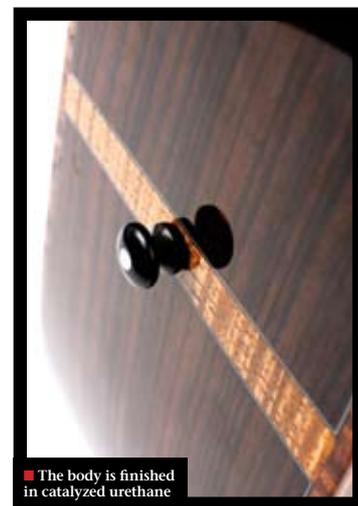
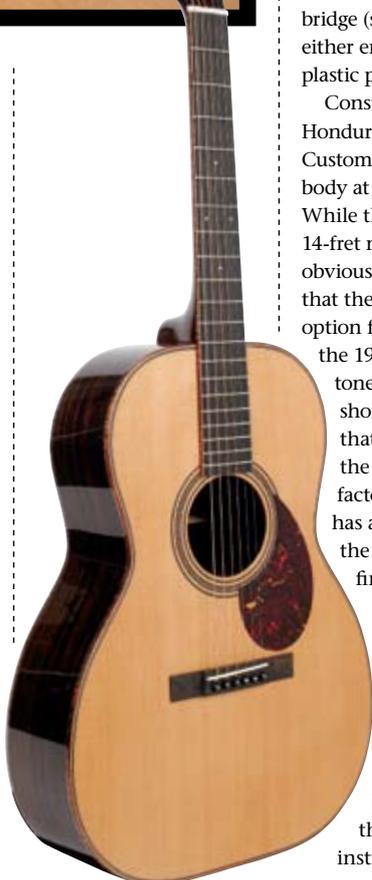
Measuring 384mm across its lower bout and with a body depth of 105mm, the 000-SP Custom is more or less the same size as Martin's 12-fret 000 model. (The body sizes established by the Martin Company – 0, 00, 000, D and OM – have long been used as a point of reference when considering steel-string acoustic guitars.) The guitar's bookmatched top is built from exceptionally close-grained Sitka spruce, while the back and sides are Indian rosewood.

The review model owes its 'Custom' status to the use of attractive, highly-figured koa rather than Indian rosewood for the body and neck binding, while snakewood replaces Ivoroid for the tuner buttons. Together with the gold-plated tuners, these upgrades add £250 to the price. Other details include a herringbone

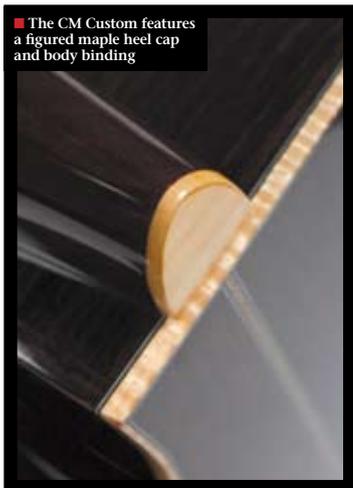
soundhole rosette, an ebony pyramid bridge (so named for the 'peaks' at either end) and a small tortoiseshell plastic pickguard.

Constructed from quarter-sawn Honduras mahogany, the 000-SP Custom's one-piece neck joins the body at the 12th rather than 14th fret. While the practical advantages of a 14-fret neck would appear to be obvious, many guitar builders believe that the 12-fret design (the standard option for flattop guitars built before the 1930s) offers greater depth of tone, citing a longer body, a shorter, stiffer neck and a bridge that's placed closer to the centre of the soundboard as determining factors. The 000-SP Custom's neck has a full, C-shaped profile, with the subtlest hint of a V in the first position.

Rather than being uniformly black, the ebony fingerboard has a dark brown hue with a series of lighter streaks that run along its length. Though black ebony has traditionally been the premium timber of choice for the fingerboards of stringed instruments, the issue is purely



The body is finished in catalyzed urethane



■ The CM Custom features a figured maple heel cap and body binding



■ An abalone rosette adorns the Engelman spruce soundboard

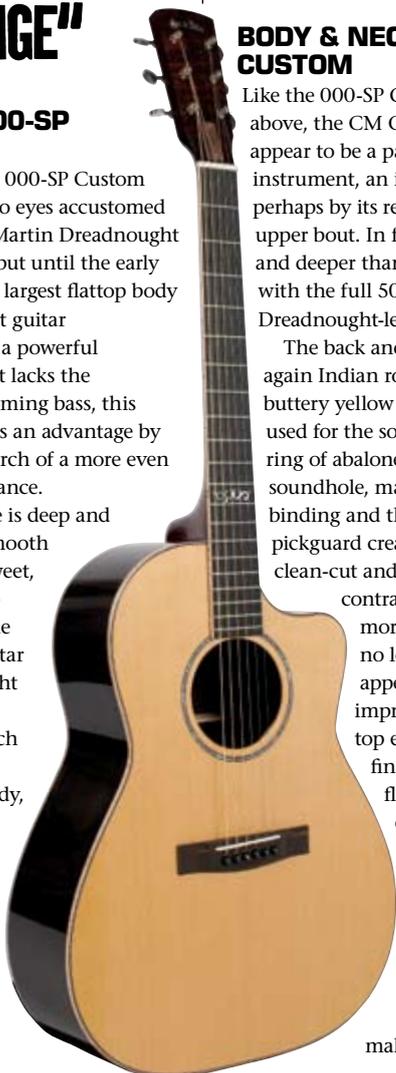
"THE CM CUSTOM SOUNDS PUNCHY AND ASSERTIVE, WITH A STRONG MID-RANGE"

SOUNDS – 000-SP CUSTOM

The Huss & Dalton 000-SP Custom may appear small to eyes accustomed to the likes of the Martin Dreadnought and Gibson J-200, but until the early 1930s, this was the largest flattop body size offered by most guitar manufacturers. It's a powerful instrument and if it lacks the Dreadnought's booming bass, this should be viewed as an advantage by fingerpickers in search of a more even string-to-string balance.

Overall, the tone is deep and resonant, with a smooth bottom end and sweet, clear trebles. Set up with a low but rattle free-action, the guitar is an absolute delight to play. The 12-fret configuration, which moves the neck further into the body, also puts the left hand in a more comfortable position, particularly when playing in the lower positions.

Though the combination of a



wide fingerboard and balanced tone makes this guitar a great choice for fingerstyle players, it sounds great played with a flat pick too. If you can live without the upper fret access that a 14-fret neck affords, we reckon that a high-quality 12-fret 000-size guitar like this one offers the ultimate blend of tonal balance and playability.

BODY & NECK – CM CUSTOM

Like the 000-SP Custom described above, the CM Custom doesn't appear to be a particularly large instrument, an impression created perhaps by its relatively narrow upper bout. In fact, it is both wider and deeper than a Martin OM, with the full 508mm of a Dreadnought-length body.

The back and sides are once again Indian rosewood, while buttery yellow Engelman spruce is used for the soundboard. A simple ring of abalone around the soundhole, maple neck and body binding and the clear plastic pickguard create a vibe that is clean-cut and contemporary, in contrast to the 000-SP's more vintage, though no less handsome appearance. Besides improving access to the top end of the fingerboard, the flattish treble side cutaway blends nicely with the guitar's overall body outline. The strings attach to an ebony 'belly' bridge.

Honduras mahogany is used

MODERN VINTAGE

THESE ACOUSTIC GUITARS FEATURE SOME STEALTHY MODERN ENHANCEMENTS



■ When you're spending top dollar on a high-quality acoustic, you want to be sure it will offer a lifetime of use.

While the radiused tops on these guitars should add strength and prevent them from caving in or bellying out, to further enhance these guitars' longevity, Huss & Dalton also uses a bolt-on butt joint to attach the neck and

body. Like the systems used by Taylor and Collings, this means that the neck can be reset (an almost inevitable procedure at some point in a steel-string guitar's life) far more easily than on a guitar with a conventional glued-in neck. The neck bolt is concealed behind a small wooden plate bearing the instrument's serial number.



■ The treble side cutaway improves access to the top frets

DETAILS

TRULY IMPECCABLE CRAFTSMENSHIP AND FIRST-CLASS TONES



■ The slotted headstock is faced with rosewood and fitted with Waverly tuners



■ The 000-SP's ebony fingerboard is inlaid with tiny pearl slotted-square markers



■ The CM Custom's wooden truss-rod cover complements the Brazilian rosewood veneer



■ These traditional nickel-plated Waverly open-gear tuners are an optional extra

GBOPINION

HUSS & DALTON 000-SP CUSTOM

GOLD STARS

- ★ Fabulous tone and playability
- ★ First-class build quality
- ★ Drop-dead gorgeous looks

BLACK MARKS

- None

IDEAL FOR...

Serious fingerpickers who want the very best

for the neck, which joins the body at the 14th fret. With a shallower profile than that of the 000-SP Custom, it feels a tad closer to the 'electric-style' necks pioneered by Taylor Guitars. Apart from a decorative gold and abalone scroll inlay at the 12th fret, the ebony fingerboard has been left plain (black dots in the maple edge binding prevent you from getting lost). The shaping of the nut and quality of fret work are once again exemplary.

The solid headstock is faced with a highly figured Brazilian rosewood veneer, which, together with the maple heel cap and nickel-plated Waverly tuners, adds £156 to the basic price. A set of gold-plated Gotoh H&D-branded tuners are otherwise fitted as standard.

SOUNDS – CM CUSTOM

The model's large body and 645mm scale length combine to deliver a bottom end that is taut and muscular rather than boomy. The low end is powerful but with no tendency to bass-heaviness. Overall, the guitar sounds punchy and assertive, with a strong mid-range projection that enables it to cut through other acoustic instruments with ease.

A versatile guitar that can handle both finger or flat-picked styles, the CM nevertheless comes into its own when strumming big chords and playing single-note lead lines. It would make a great choice for a player who needs an instrument that can hold its own in an acoustic line-up and handle a variety of playing styles.

GBCONCLUSION

CUSTOM CLASS, WITH ACOUSTIC TONE TO DIE FOR

■ **With roots that reach right back to the 'Golden Age' of the late 1920s, the 12-fret 000-SP Custom combines superb playability with a time-honoured vintage vibe. A thing of beauty with tone to die for, it stands shoulder to shoulder with similar models from Martin, Collings and Santa Cruz.**

More original in design, the 14-fret CM Custom is an excellent all-rounder that provides the gigging guitarist with a tool capable of covering almost any musical situation. Both guitars are built from top-notch materials to the very highest standards. They ain't cheap, but in this case you get what you pay for. If you are looking for a lifetime of acoustic pleasure then be sure to add the name Huss & Dalton to your shopping list. **GB**

GBOPINION

HUSS & DALTON CM CUSTOM

GOLD STARS

- ★ Sounds equally fine played with a pick or fingers
- ★ First-class build quality
- ★ Tastefully modern styling

BLACK MARKS

- None

IDEAL FOR...

Someone who needs a steel-string guitar that can handle a variety of applications

GBRATINGS

HUSS & DALTON 000-SP CUSTOM



GBRATINGS

HUSS & DALTON CM CUSTOM

