



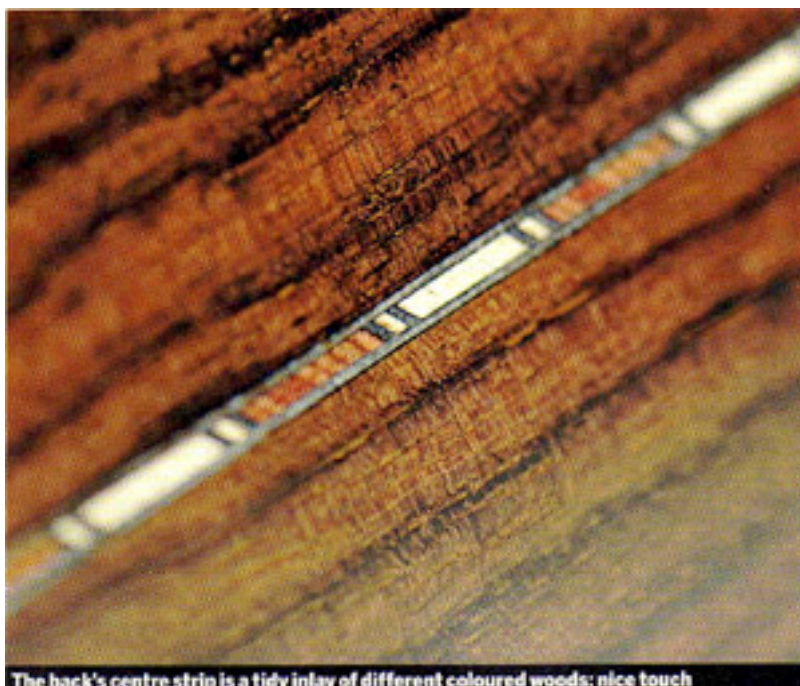
Guitarist
CHOICE

Atkin AA Standard **£1,895**

British guitar maker Alister Atkin departs from his homage to classic American acoustics with this new 'original' mid-bodied design *by Jim Chapman*

Until very recently, Alister Atkin's catalogue has been predominately influenced by vintage Martin and Gibson styles – whether it's his 17-inch wide jumbo, a J-45 slope-shoulder dreadnought, or the compact-bodied 00. Now, however, the addition of the AA sees him branching out in a more personalised direction. At first glance it's tempting to regard the 15-inch wide AA as a smaller version of his SJ small jumbo, but apparently that's not so. "The starting point was my OM," says Alister. "I wanted to make something OM in size but sweeten up the profile a bit, because sometimes I think the OM looks a bit cumbersome in places, even though it's my best-selling model. I wanted a more waisted look,

plus the AA is much flatter around the base of the lower bouts than the small jumbo. Add a new headstock and bridge design and it's a completely original instrument."



The back's centre strip is a tidy inlay of different coloured woods: nice touch

Test results

Build quality	★★★★★
Playability	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

Well, yes but as this reviewer sat gazing at the guitar, it suddenly seemed that there was vaguely something of Takamine about the lines – like a scaled-down lovechild of a liaison between that maker's NEX mini jumbo and it's more vintage-like OM. Alister is a little disarmed: "Takamine never consciously crossed my mind when I was designing the guitar." So, subliminal influences or, much more likely, sheer coincidence. Whichever, the result is a very attractive instrument, compact enough to

OM. Alister is a little disarmed: "Takamine never consciously crossed my mind when I was designing the guitar." So, subliminal influences or, much more likely, sheer coincidence. Whichever, the result is a very attractive instrument, compact enough to

OM. Alister is a little disarmed: "Takamine never consciously crossed my mind when I was designing the guitar." So, subliminal influences or, much more likely, sheer coincidence. Whichever, the result is a very attractive instrument, compact enough to

be really comfortable to handle, but big enough still to be a player's main guitar – an important criterion for Atkin. During development, he made a couple of deeper rimmed prototypes, but the consensus was that this slightly shallower final version – still a relatively capacious 103mm across the baseblock – simply sounded better. Our sample is the second production example; the first was snapped up by Callum MacColl, brother of the late Kirsty.

Though Atkin still offers some custom options – relating primarily to body timbers, neck widths and fretboard inlays – he has essentially standardised his range, mainly in the interests of offering customers clearly defined choices and also “avoiding wacky on-offs” which slow down production. The division nowadays is between Standard and Deluxe models, the latter embellishing the trim with such detailing as abalone rosettes and bound pegheads. This might imply that our AA Standard is a relatively plain affair, but

in the finer points of its cosmetics that's not so. The rosette, for example, features a discreetly tasteful double ring of tortie, while ebony used for the headplate is also employed for the body binding, purfled front and back with coachlined black/white wood strips. The ebony fingerboard, formerly unbound, is now bound as standard, and the back carries a narrow barber's pole-style centre strip of contrasting woods. The only aspect of our sample that is a cost-on option is the top's vintage sunbursting, which adds £200 to the basic £1,695 price tag. A full body and neck bursting is also offered, at a £400 uplift.

Concerning timbers, the AA conforms to Atkin's usual combination of a Sitka spruce top and rosewood back and sides – all solid of course. Interestingly, mahogany for the latter is not an option, essentially because top-quality Brazilian variety, which Alister favours, is no longer any cheaper to buy than Indian rosewood. Hence rosewood represents another facet of range standardisation.

As on all Atkins, the AA is sprayed up in high-gloss nitro-cellulose – on both body and neck – and the standard of finishing is generally excellent. Yes, there is the merest hint of hazing on the black areas of the upper bouts when caught in a certain light but, as we all know, black is ruthlessly unforgiving for showing the slightest mark, and it's something that simply wouldn't be noticeable on a natural finish. During the first few days with the guitar, the neck feels a tad sticky, but this is far from uncommon with nitro-cellulose, which often takes a while to fully cure off and is a relatively soft finish anyway that merits more TLC than polyester or polyurethane. Happily, after a few rubs with a polishing cloth and a couple of days playing in, the neck is of the desired slickness.





Atkin AA Standard

PRICE: £1,895 (inc case)
ORIGIN: UK
TYPE: OM-size acoustic
TOP: Solid Sitka spruce
BACK/SIDES: Solid rosewood
MAX RIM DEPTH: 103mm
MAX BODY WIDTH: 385mm
NECK: Brazilian mahogany
SCALE LENGTH: 645mm (25.4-inch)
TUNERS: Chrome Grover StaTites
NUT/WIDTH: Bone/43mm
FINGERBOARD: Bound ebony with 406mm (16-inch) radius
FRETS: 20, thin
BRIDGE/SPACING: Ebony with bone saddle/55mm
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 2.0/4.4
OPTIONS: Natural-finish AA Standard (£1,695). AA Deluxe, including abalone rosette and gold tuners – from £2,095. Add £200 for cutaway. Various timber, trim and electro options – details and prices on request
LEFT-HANDERS: Yes, no extra cost
FINISH: Gloss nitro-cellulose, with vintage sunburst top
Atkin Guitars 01227 719933
www.atkinguitars.com

Attached using a collings-style bolting system, the 645mm-scale, dark-stained mahogany neck is a three-piece affair, with scarfed headstock and separate heel portion. Until about five years ago, Alister employed one-piece necks but switched to minimise timber wastage in view of the escalating cost of Brazilian mahogany. Another more recent change is fitting Grover StaTite tuners rather than Waverlys. Now you might consider this a downgrade, but these are the pukka 18.1 StaTites, not the cheapies appearing like a retro rash on budget boxes these days. Atkin reckons they're nearly as good as Waverly – we'd agree – and what's more they're considerably less expensive, helping keep a lid on prices. Dimensionally, the neck profile occupies the middle ground, with a 43mm nut width and regulation 55mm string spacing at the bridge. Allied to a quite shallow, 'C'-with-a-hint-of-'V' profile, it's comfortably snug for strumming duties yet sufficiently airy for easy fingerstyle. The fretting is immaculately dressed and, in case you're wondering, the side reference dots are present and correct on the otherwise markerless fingerboard.

SOUNDS

In pursuing a 'sweetened' profile design brief, Atkin has also endowed the AA with a sweetly voiced sound. Which is not to say twee, but rather a very engaging blend of warm-edged, sustainful fluidity, supple, responsive dynamics and excellent tonal poise and clarity. It's no slouch in terms of volume or projection either, and feels and sounds just as at home with hearty chord work as it does with delicate picking. All desirable attributes for a mid-sized all-rounder.

VERDICT

This AA, like all previous Atkins this writer has played, is a very accomplished instrument. Whether or not it ultimately knocks his traditional OM of the number-one spot, it deserves to become a popular seller. Arguable Takamine-esque allusions aside, it does indeed have a distinctive (and enticing) visual personality within the context of his other models; there's a simple elegance to the detailing which sensibly eschews unnecessary frills; and overall build and sound quality are of a reassuringly high calibre. A success in the making, surely.