



ATKIN

Dust Bowl OM

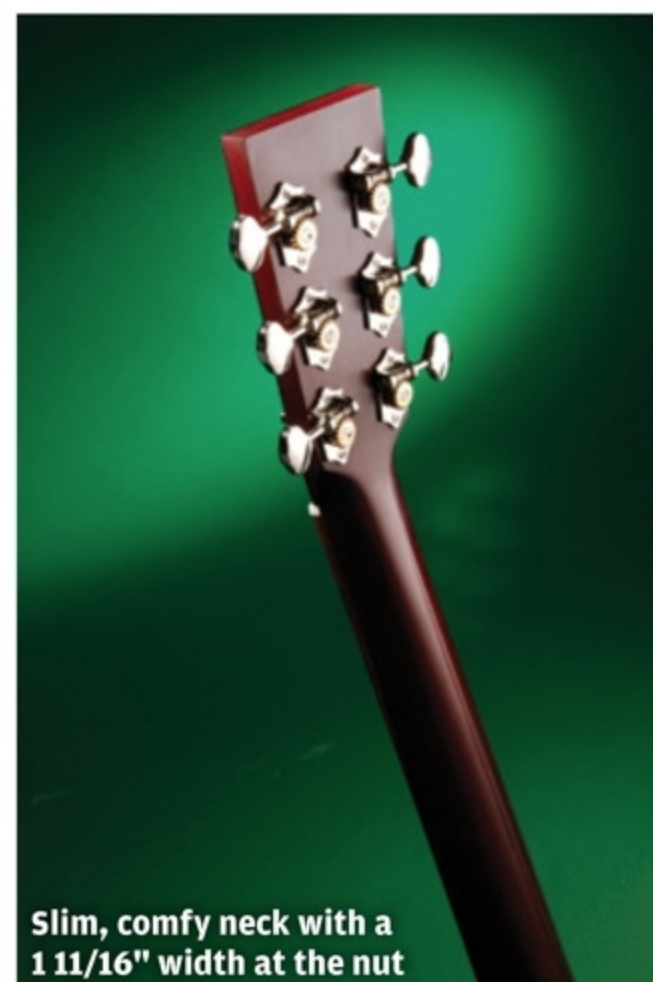
Less frills, less cash, just as much tone: that's the well-timed aim of this Canterbury maker's latest guitar family, and we're looking at the classic Orchestra Model. Review by **Jerry Uwins**

Over the last 16 years Canterbury-based Alister Atkin has established himself as one of the UK's most highly-regarded acoustic makers, and this year looks like being his busiest ever. In between building for his own enterprise, he has been commissioned by the Buddy Holly Foundation in the States to make four of the 25 replicas of Holly's 1943 Gibson J-45 which are being loaned long-term to well-known artists to use to help raise funds for charitable organisations. Three of Atkin's contributions are going to Albert Lee, Mick Jones and Sharlene Spiteri, while the fourth will be passed around different players. Of the six luthiers involved, Alister is the only one to represent the UK - a considerable accolade, and a real feather in his cap.

His catalogue, meanwhile, is expanding with some speed. Recent introductions include mahogany-backed 18-Style additions to the previously rosewood-only 28-Style Retrospectives; a Vintage Series, sporting herringbone purfling and tint tops; and the all-mahogany AM Specials, which apply a gloss treatment to an otherwise simply-trimmed look. Arguably the most intriguing are the new Dust Bowls, which are being offered in four common sizes - 0, 00, OM and dreadnought.



Simple stain finish, but real rosewood binding



Slim, comfy neck with a 1 11/16" width at the nut

Sunburst-topped and satin-finished, this guitar aims to evoke the austerity of America's Depression era

As the name implies, these sunburst-topped satin-finish guitars aim to evoke the austerity of instruments made during America's Depression era of the '20s and '30s, circumstances that are reflected in our own present-day recession. Priced as the cheapest guitars in the Atkin line-up, the Dust Bowls are officially limited editions -

and you'll get a numbered certificate to say so - but since the economic clouds show few signs of lifting, you can expect Alister to be making them for some while to come. In a facetious moment I pondered whether 'Sink Estate' might be a pertinent UK substitute name for Dust Bowl, but decided the connotations weren't exactly alluring... ➔

FACTFILE

Atkin Dust Bowl OM

DESCRIPTION **Orchestra-size acoustic. Made in UK**
PRICE **£1699 inc Hiscox case**

BUILD **Solid spruce top, solid mahogany back and sides. Mahogany neck with 20-fret bound rosewood fingerboard. Rosewood bridge, bone nut and saddle, chrome Grover Sta-Tite tuners, bottom strap button**

OPTIONS **Cedar top at same price; all-mahogany build, plus £50. Also done in sizes 0, 00 and dreadnought, from £1699 each. Electro systems on request**

LEFT-HANDERS **To order at no extra cost**

FINISH **Satin with sunburst top**

SCALE LENGTH **645mm/25.4"**

NECK WIDTH

Nut 43mm

12th fret 53.5mm

DEPTH OF NECK

First fret 20.5mm

9th fret 21.5mm

STRING SPACING

Nut 36mm

Bridge 55mm

ACTION AS SUPPLIED

12th fret treble 1.8mm

12th fret bass 2.4mm

MAX RIM DEPTH **105mm**

MAX BODY WIDTH **388mm**

FINGERBOARD RADIUS **20"**

WEIGHT **1.7kg/3.75lb**

CONTACT **Atkin Guitars**

01227 719933

www.atkinguitars.com

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Martin
000-15M
Stripped-back, satin-finish all-mahogany folk is a binding-free zone. Comes with an ebony bridge and open-gear tuners
RRP £1216

Dave King
KATRINA
1930s-style 12-fret 000 has spade peghead and simple trim. Choice of spruce or cedar top, mahogany or rosewood back/sides
RRP from £1895

Larrivee
OM-03
Satin-finish spruce/mahogany with maple binding, ebony fingerboard and bridge, fingerstyle neck
RRP £1020

Note: all the above are all-solid woods

With a body drawn up along Martin lines with a lower bout span of approximately 15.25", a maximum rim depth of 105mm and a 645mm/25.4" scale length, our OM (serial number 001) has a spruce top and mahogany back and sides - all-solid, of course - but you can specify a cedar front at no extra cost, or even a very '30s mahogany top for a modest £50 upcharge.

The deep brown staining of the back, sides and neck and the nicely aged look of the vintage-burst top contribute to an appropriately austere aesthetic, but look more closely and you'll spot some discreetly tasteful touches. The body is bound with rosewood, the rosette is a thin tortie circle, and the spade peghead - with a gloss rosewood capping and the 'Dust Bowl' scroll logo - carries a set of open-gear Grover Sta-Tite tuners which really suit the period look. As ever, they work efficiently, too. The



Lovely sitka top - but you can choose cedar or mahogany as well

rosewood bridge pins are inlaid with pearl dots, though Alister wonders whether, in this context, they're a bit

of millimetres too. He'll also fit gratis, if requested, a heel strap button which isn't part of the standard spec.

The Dust Bowl sounds far from dour: it's a beaut, with ringing highs, warm lows and a bloom in the midrange

blingy... he may choose to substitute plain ones in the future.

Though it's hard to see the grain of the neck under the dark stain, rest assured that it's one-piece mahogany, secured using Atkin's usual Collings-style bolting system. As on the body, the satin finish is fabulously smooth to the touch, something Alister attributes to recently sourcing a superior brand of nitrocellulose lacquer, and also using new, different abrasives for cutting back in between coats. I've yet to play an acoustic neck that feels slicker and faster than this one. Dimensionally it's mainstream, starting off at 43mm across the nut, with a snugly shallow 'C' profile that has the merest hint of V'ing along the crown. Bridge string spacing is an all-purpose 55mm.

The medium-thin fretting along the bound rosewood fingerboard is immaculately fitted and dressed, and the very gentle radius - approximately 20" - is very much a friend of a slinky action. There are no front position markers but the important side dots are all there. The set-up is a fine picker as it stands, but Atkin recognises that some of us favour a wider fingerstyle neck, and if you ask then he'll swap with no extra charge to one that's 45mm at the nut, with a broadened 57mm bridge string spacing. Span at the octave correspondingly increases by a couple

Sounds

The Dust Bowl's image might be one of austerity, but its performance is far from dour: in fact it's a beaut. The sustainful sound is richly projecting with plenty of quick dynamic panache, and the tone marries an OM's anticipated clarity and precise articulation with sweetly ringing highs, warm, firmly rooted lows and a nicely subtle bloom in the midrange. Drop tunings really sing out. It's adaptable too: blues, ragtime, lyrically folksy - it takes to them all like a duck to the wet stuff.

Verdict

Not only has Alister Atkin produced a stonkingly fine player with a distinctive stripped-back aesthetic and made to his usual very high standards, he has, perhaps unwittingly, come up with an instrument - or series - that's unique. Sure, any number of luthiers would be happy to make something similar to custom order, but the Dust Bowls are regular (if limited) catalogue models, and no other professional maker, as far as I can glean, is presently doing anything like them at this enticingly affordable price. This is an OM that captures the zeitgeist with gusto. 🎸



The small-pattern sunburst really captures a prewar atmosphere

FINAL SCORE

ATKIN DUST BOWL OM ACOUSTIC	
Build Quality	19/20
Playability	20/20
Sound	20/20
Value for money	19/20
Looks	16/20
TOTAL	94%