

FIRST PLAY



**AUDEN 632 SERIES
CHESTER 000**
£1,699

WHAT IS IT? Chinese/UK-built, satin-finished acoustic with top-notch woods and an otherworldly electronic voice



**AUDEN 632 SERIES
BOWMAN OM**
£1,699

WHAT IS IT? Much the same as above, save for a slightly smaller build, and a 'turbocharged OM' performance

Numbers Game

A new series of short-scale acoustics joins the ranks at Auden and we couldn't wait to dive in and take a closer look

Words David Mead Photography Neil Godwin

Auden acoustics have featured many times in these pages, even claiming top spot on the winners' podium for the Austin 12-string in issue 441's Gear Of The Year. And so we always keep a keen eye open whenever the company lets us know that a new model is in the offing. Such is the case with the pair of acoustics before us now, the 632 Series Bowman and Chester models. These two models have been in the Auden catalogue for some time, the name descriptive of specific body shapes of which there are already a number of variations in terms of timber and turnout. Here, the two instruments are very close cousins to Auden's Artist Rosewood Series in general terms, save for the fact that both share a shorter scale length – 632mm





(24.9 inches), rather than 655mm (25.8 inches). Whereas you might think that just a few millimetres aren't going to make a huge difference, remember that this is, essentially speaking, the difference between playing a Gibson versus a Fender in terms of feel and playability.

Auden's instruments are partly made by a small team of luthiers based in China with the final fettling taking place at the company's UK facility in Northamptonshire. To clarify further, when we spoke to Auden's director Doug Sparkes back in issue 448, he told us: "[The Chinese workshop] has a phenomenal warehouse of timber that's years and years and years old, which they're constantly replenishing, and we'll go and pick the timbers that we want for the backs, sides and the tops of these guitars. They then build the wooden shell of the guitar, and the guitar comes over to the UK.

"The frets are in on the neck," he continued, "but they're not dressed and they're not crowned, so we'll do the fretwork, the final neck set, we make the nut, we make the saddle, we'll fit all the electronics, we put all the hardware on and we'll give it its final buff and polish before it goes out to market."

We have to say that both of these acoustics look as though they have benefitted from that stockpile of fine timber as the tonewoods look to be nothing short of top-class. But what do they play and sound like? Time to take a closer look...

The spec on these guitars is very similar, the only major difference being body shape, the Chester measuring in as a triple-0 and the Bowman an OM. In both instances the tops are from high-grade cedar with the type of tight grain and cross patterning – that shimmering, slightly wavy 'watermark' effect within the wood – that is generally more prevalent on spruce tops. The Indian rosewood used for the backs and sides is well up to premium grade, too – hats off to Auden's Chinese wood store. Under the bonnet, we're told that the mahogany necks are dovetailed to the bodies using old-style hide glue, another tip of the hat to traditional guitar building that goes back decades.

Fingerboards are African ebony with discreet position markers in all the usual places. Tuning is under the auspices of Schertler 18:1 ratio open-back tuners and we would add here that we only had



1. The Indian rosewood and maple binding present on both instruments are evidence of top-class workmanship from the Auden team
2. Both the Bowman and Chester (pictured here) have finely grained cedar tops
3. Just visible through the Chester's soundhole are the preamp sliders for the Brad Clark SuperNatural pickup
4. Schertler 18:1 ratio open-back machineheads are on standby for fine-tuning duties

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to tune both of these instruments once during the entire time they spent with us and so we can attest to the fact that tuning is rock solid.

The intricate detailing, that is the rosewood and maple combo that makes up the binding around the tops and backs, has been very nicely applied and, overall, both guitars have the aura of pro-level instruments.

One thing that sets Auden acoustics apart in the marketplace is the electronics. The Brad Clark SuperNatural DS system has been fitted to both our review samples and comprises both an undersaddle pickup with six individual polepieces and a sensor that sits under the guitar's top. The thing that really sets the SuperNatural apart is its soundhole-mounted preamp, which features a three-band EQ and presets – designated as being Thick Strum, Finger Pick, Solo and Thin Strum – and so, in theory at least, it's possible to change your EQ setting quickly during a performance with the same sort of ease that you'd switch between pickups on a Strat. Each of these presets is customisable and so you can tweak to your individual needs.

Feel & Sounds

Picking the Chester up first, it proves to be quite the powerhouse, in terms of output. It feels good in the hands, too,





5. The Bowman model's Indian rosewood back and sides share the same high quality as its stablemate

6. An ebony bridge and string pins with a Tusq saddle complete the soundboard furniture here on the Bowman



with a generous but not overwrought C profile and that satin finish offering a very wholesome playing experience. Chords fill the room to the extent that you'd have to look twice to make sure you weren't holding a dreadnought, such is the sumptuous bass-rich response on offer here. Those high-grade tonewoods really are earning their keep.

Switching to the slightly more trim Bowman OM we find a good match and definite family resemblance in terms of feel, and the sound seems, to us at least, more focused while maintaining all the richness and superb projection of its brother in arms. It's everything you'd expect from a finely crafted OM – and perhaps a little more.

Plugging the guitars into our trusty AER Compact 60, the SuperNatural slider controls are very easy to navigate through with bass, mids, treble and volume, left to right. The presets are selected via a push button and a green light flashes once for the first, twice for the second and so on, so you always know where you are. The resulting sound is pure and transparent, transporting the sound of the instrument faithfully towards your live audience. The presets are subtle with no sudden leaps in volume or intensity to alarm you on stage. We found that getting a very



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workable sound through the AER was really easy and any tweaks were very straightforward to administer. If we were going to be really picky, we'd say that reaching for the preset button might be a little hit or miss in a live situation, but it's very likely that it would become second nature after using it for a while. All things considered, however, the SuperNatural is easily on a par with the best acoustic pickups we've tried.

7. Both guitars share a lot of details with Auden's Artist Rosewood Series save for the shorter scale length of 632mm (24.9 inches)

The thing that sets the models' Brad Clark SuperNatural DS pickup system apart is its soundhole-mounted preamp

Verdict

It seems that Auden has done it again in that the company has produced a pair of extremely well-made guitars with bags of character and great sound, topped off with a very capable pickup and preamp combo. If we're allowed to pick a favourite it would have to be the Bowman OM purely for its all-rounder status, but both deserve plaudits aplenty on build quality and sound at this highly competitive price point. Check one out – you will probably be as bowled over as we were. **G**



AUDEN 632 SERIES CHESTER 000

PRICE: £1,699 (inc case)
ORIGIN: China/UK
TYPE: 000 acoustic
TOP: Cedar
BACK/SIDES: Indian rosewood
MAX RIM DEPTH: 115mm
MAX BODY WIDTH: 395mm
NECK: African mahogany
SCALE LENGTH: 632mm (24.9")
TUNERS: Schertler 18:1 open back
NUT/WIDTH: Bone/43mm
FINGERBOARD: Ebony
FRETS: 20
BRIDGE/SPACING: Ebony with bone saddle/54mm
ELECTRICS: Brad Clark SuperNatural DS
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 2.13/4.7/
OPTIONS: None
RANGE OPTIONS: Auden's Chester range includes a selection of body wood and finish choices, including Auden Tobacco Series Chester (£1,499), Maple Series Chester (£1,799), Black Series (£1,599) and Rosewood Series Cutaway (£1,749). See website for further details
LEFT-HANDERS: Yes
FINISH: Satin

Auden Guitars
www.audenguitars.com



9/10

PROS Superb build and finish; packed with good tones and lively playability

CONS Not so much a con, as such, but preamp controls may take a little getting used to



AUDEN 632 SERIES BOWMAN OM

PRICE: £1,699 (inc case)
ORIGIN: China/UK
TYPE: OM acoustic
TOP: Cedar
BACK/SIDES: Indian rosewood
MAX RIM DEPTH: 101mm
MAX BODY WIDTH: 377mm
NECK: African mahogany
SCALE LENGTH: 632mm (24.9")
TUNERS: Schertler 18:1 open back
NUT/WIDTH: Bone/43mm
FINGERBOARD: Ebony
FRETS: 20
BRIDGE/SPACING: Ebony with bone/composite saddle/54mm
ELECTRICS: Brad Clark SuperNatural DS
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 1.93/4.26
OPTIONS: None
RANGE OPTIONS: Auden's Bowman Rosewood Series currently features 2 other models: Neo Series Full Body (£999) and Artist Rosewood Series Spruce Cutaway (£1,749). More versions of this body shape are available – see website
LEFT-HANDERS: Yes
FINISH: Satin



9/10

PROS Lovely all-rounder with great sounds available across the spectrum

CONS As with the Chester, just that those preamp controls present a slight learning curve