

Cone Ranger

With new resonator guitars entering the market at a fair old rate of late, Jez Ayscough checks out an example from one of the UK's niche market reso producers

The resurgence in interest in world music and traditional blues has been steadily gaining momentum for the past decade, and interest in styles such as acoustic folk and bluegrass remains strong. As such, demand for resonator guitars (among others) has been particularly buoyant of late, with many music stores harbouring a Dobro or National-style instrument in their inventory. Whether budget or high end, the spectrum of product available in this genre is large. Ranges of resonators can be found at various price points, from those that will get you started for a couple of hundred pounds, to vintage instruments costing thousands. An alternative to the established brands (as always), domestic luthiers haven't been slow to act on requests for resos from customers, with several notable makers turning out some beautiful examples recently.

Based in Leicestershire, guitar maker John Alderson is the man behind Delta Resonator Guitars, a new outfit specialising in the production of affordable reso instruments (and last month's featured Eric Builder). The company are now actively preparing to launch an assault on the UK with guitars such as the wooden bodied tri-cone resonator before us...

Body & Neck

Laminated materials are commonly employed in resonator construction (to provide strength and tonal projection) and laminated mahogany is Delta's body material of choice, with the outline of this tri-cone model following a traditional 'figure-8' shape. The guitar is fitted with three 6" resonator cones which are literally pressed down into

the body of the guitar (which is slightly deeper than usual) by the strings and covered over with the plate - in turn the string vibrations carry through the triplate assembly and the characteristically robust volume of these instruments is achieved.

A brass tri-cone cover and grille furnish the top of this guitar, with the nickel-plated finish applied to both gleaming and reflecting, quite literally, the fact that this is an expensive manufacturing process.

John's spraying techniques provide interesting food for thought. Acrylic lacquer is not only applied externally to the body of the guitar but also internally to the cavity of the resonators. His reasoning behind the decision is this - if the wood is left unfinished then the sound will remain soft, as the timber absorbs some of the tonal 'bite' of the instrument. Administering glass to the whole body means more of the volume produced by the cones will be bounced back through the soundholes. Something we'll deliver a verdict on shortly...

A little close inspection of the finish on this particular tri-cone reveals some sinkage and pitting on this

GOLD STARS

- ★ Wonderful, big tone
- ★ Excellent price tag

BLACK MARKS

- Less-than-perfect finishing in some areas

Ideal for...

Fingerstylers, ragtimers and sweet-sounding slide styles and those looking for a down-home home-grown alternative to US brands



instrument, not something that's going to be detrimental to the sound of the guitar but a situation that we'd like to see rectified on an instrument that has its sights set as high as this one.

A 3-piece mahogany neck with a gorgeous 'V' profile is joined to the body at the twelfth fret – rounded examples can be specified when ordering – and the bone nut width is a healthy 48mm. The fingerboard of this guitar is ebony and benefits from diamond inlays for fret marker positions as well as Iveroid edge binding, which finishes things off very nicely indeed.

In Use

Tri-cones this sweet with plenty of volume are difficult to locate, especially at this affordable(ish) price tag. This instrument has almost unrivalled tonal qualities in its price range and, happily, plays well throughout the fingerboard. Despite an action high enough for slide playing, notes can still be fretted at most positions on the fretboard fairly easily, and using a capo also works well without interfering with the intonation of this guitar too much. Commendable.

Attacking this instrument with slide in hand works really well, with the tone remaining full and sweet. The Delta provides a full bass note and sweet highs with the action set up perfectly for this type of approach. And all at a wonderfully indulgent level of volume.

No little credit deserves to go to the cones themselves. Delta Cones' Deep South-type fitted here play a significant part in creating the full, warm response from the instrument – their High Country set deliver more treble and middle, but also produce a more than adequate bass note. But we like the Deep Souths on this guitar very much. They might make the instrument a little polite-sounding for real rootsy bluesers, but for a slightly more sophisticated take on the reso tone they're gems.

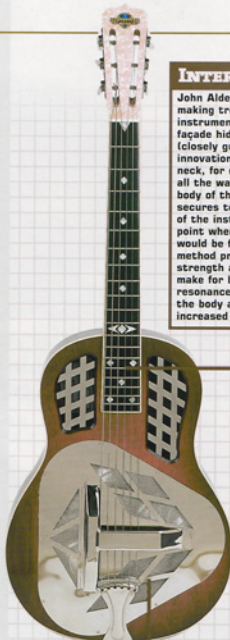
CONCLUSION

Although we'd be lying if we declared this guitar to be the best-finished we've ever seen (with particular respect to some of the finishing and fitting of the tri-cone assembly), we cannot argue with the full, warm, sweet yet biting tone it creates, and at fantastic volume too. John Alderson might yet be in the early stages of his serious guitar building career, but on the evidence of this particular tri-cone, his is definitely a name to watch.

DETAILS

INTERNAL INNOVATION

John Alderson may be making traditional-looking instruments, but the façade hides several (closely guarded) innovations. The 3-piece neck, for example, travels all the way through the body of this guitar and secures to the end block of the instrument, the point where the strap pin would be fitted. This method provides extra strength and will also make for better resonance as a result of the body and neck increased contact.



THE LOWDOWN JOHN ALDERSON TRI-CONE RESONATOR

Built in: UK

Technical
Scale Length: 26"
Nut width: 1 14/16"

Woods

Top: laminated mahogany

Back: laminated mahogany

Sides: laminated mahogany

Neck: mahogany

Fingerboard: Ebony

Bridge: Tri-cone assembly

Hardware

Schaller

Machines

Outways available for £50 extra

Hardware

Delta

Tel: 07968 822131

Fax: 01455 272012

Email: Deltacones@aol.com

GG Rating



PRICE
£1595
INC. CASE

T FOR THREE

The cones fitted to this instrument are 6" in diameter and are totally hand spun from aluminium. In most cases, cones that are readily available in the market place are part hand- and machine-constructed. Colin Oldham from Delta Cones has spent many hours developing these new products and the material used is the highest quality available. Research into producing the best cones has been taken very seriously – angles, contouring and shaping of the circular discs have all been experimented with so as to achieve the best possible sound reproduction. The result? Well, amongst other things, huge volume. The cones in this tri-cone have produced a massive 103.2DB at a distance of 2 feet from the resonator.