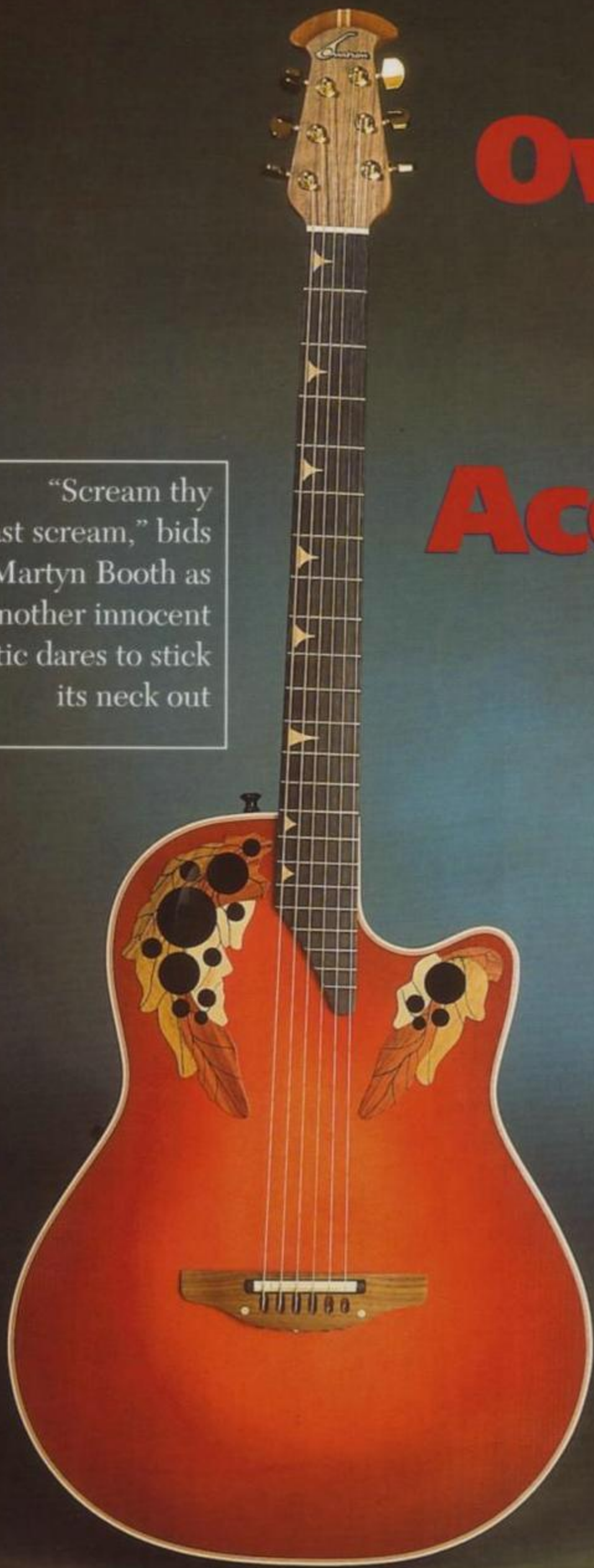


"Scream thy last scream," bids Martyn Booth as another innocent acoustic dares to stick its neck out



Ovation Long Neck Acoustic

At first sight you could be forgiven for not noticing much different about this new addition to the ever expanding range of Ovation roundback guitars, but you would be very wrong! This is a radical new approach to the *raison d'être* of guitars and the result is startling. The departure from the norm is an extra three inches on the scale length and an intended down tuning of two semitones – the idea is so simple that it's hard to believe that no one has done it before. I wouldn't be surprised if a custom maker somewhere has tried it, but you can be sure that Ovation are the first major manufacturer to come up with the goods and I really think they may have found a winner. Kaman Music UK were disarmingly modest about the market potential of such an unconventional guitar – I think that once people hear it, they will be raiding the stationery cupboard to find enough order pads!

Construction

The Long Neck guitar is part of the Elite range and has many constructional and cosmetic features in common with this established line. The solid spruce top is supported by a specially designed Ovation bracing pattern called 'Quintad'. This double fan system is made possible by dispensing with the traditional centre soundhole in favour of the Adamas style multiple hole group in the upper bout.

Without the usual large soundhole in direct line with the greatest structural

► your feedback ills, Spirit are quite up front in admitting that to rid yourself of feedback at specific frequencies you need much more closely spaced filters and a far greater number of them. The PowerStation's graphics are thus designed to be used *creatively*, to give you a little more sparkle than you might otherwise get purely from the channel EQ, and very sensible this is too.

In Use

Spirit have managed to come up with a wonderfully versatile and adaptable product with the PowerStation and when you come to put it through its paces you really get the impression that a considerable amount of effort was put into coming up with something not a million miles from Pro Quality Central. For a start the mike preamps, with their 0 to 60dB of gain on tap, can cope with pretty much everything that you're likely to want to plug into them, the EQ section works over a usefully wide range and features like the graphics and Lexicon are of obvious appeal. However, it is the smaller details and the attention which is afforded them that really sets the PowerStation apart.

After all, every mixer has a three band EQ, loads of them have graphics, but not all of them boast a high pass filter and a subsonic filter to boot. The high pass filter

combats low frequency rumble quite effectively so you can set things up to be bassy but not boomy, if you see what I mean, whilst the subsonic filter ensures that your cabs are spared woofer mangling super low frequencies.

Spirit have clearly put a great deal of effort into the design and build quality of the power amp section of the PowerStation as well. According to Spirit's Andy Farmer the unit was taken around the world for a year and road tested to within an inch of its life to ensure that it wasn't going to fall apart, blow up, or misbehave in any way. The fact that it coped with all that means it's going to take the odd pub gig well in its stride; the PowerStation gives the impression of being pretty bomb proof, both in terms of the mixer section and the innards of the machine itself. The power amp is rated at 300 watts (peak) in stereo and it delivers this cleanly and without distortion, reinforcing the impression that no corners have been cut where the quality of the important bits are concerned.

Conclusion

Spirit have made it their mission to bring real quality within the fiscal means of all those who take their music seriously and the PowerStation is a good example of their ethos. Everything about it has been carefully thought through and executed,

from the EQ and routing system to the power amp and the inclusion of the Lexicon reverb and the build quality is really second to none.

For any serious band looking for a compact, business like PA package with enough power to handle vocals, keys, guitars etc for club gigs the PowerStation has got to be a very serious contender – buy one and it'll probably last forever, or at least until the singer and the drummer fall out over who's more important to the band sound and you're left trying to figure out how to split the PA five ways. ■

SPEC CHECK

Spirit PowerStation

Price: £1,328
Power: 300 watts (peak) x 2,
265 watts RMS x 2
Features: eight mono, two stereo channels, Lexicon reverb, three band EQ, seven band graphics, high pass and subsonic filters

Contact: Spirit By Soundcraft, Harman Industries Ltd, Cranborne House, Cranborne Industrial Estate, Cranborne Road, Potters Bar, Herts EN6 3JN. Tel: 01707 665000.



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tension, the table is stronger and can be lightly braced parallel with the grain. This allows it to vibrate very freely and if you combine this with the reflective qualities of the roundback it's easy to see that the result is certainly going to be different.

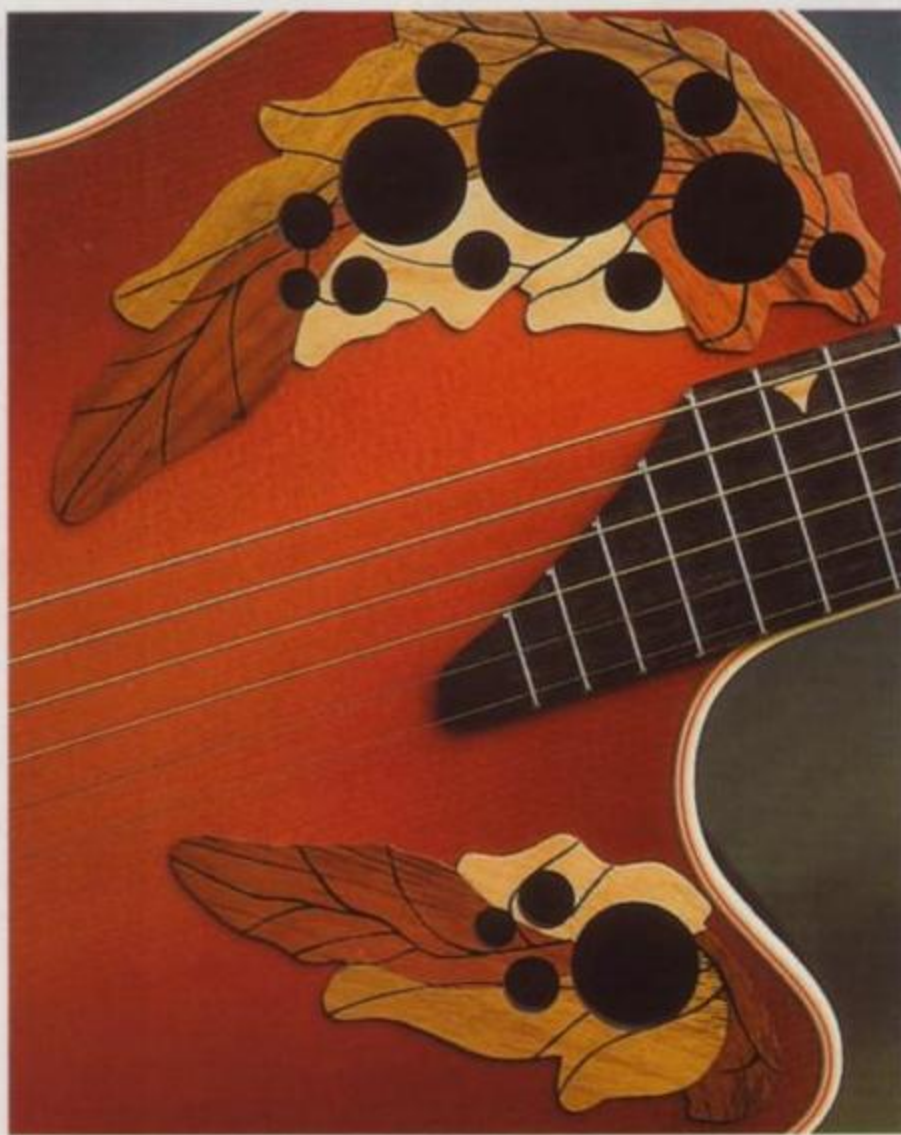
But this is not even half the story... imagine now that you shift the bridge back into the lower bout an inch or so, increase the scale length by more than three inches to 28.35", add an extra deep bowl (fully six inches at the centre) and detune the whole guitar to D; we are now talking *seriously* different. We can only guess which of these factors contributes most to the sound of the guitar, but it is worth a little conjecture. I've got no idea how the Ovation designers thought this project through, but here are a few possibilities: by moving the bridge back closer to the centre of the lower bout, they have improved the chance of transmitting vibration directly into the most flexible part of the table. No internal bridge plate is needed because of Ovation's string-thru philosophy, therefore the bracing is very light in this area and is more closely related to a Spanish guitar than a typical American dreadnought. Free moving tops can be good in developing bass volume but sometimes have a woolly tone - no problem, the extended scale length and down tuning allow the strings to articulate better.

Now all you've got to do is amplify the sound and get it out of the guitar as quickly and cleanly as possible, and the Ovation roundback technology is ideal for this job. With a body 20.25" long, 15.875" wide and 6" deep in the centre there is a lot of air waiting to be pushed around! The bowl shaped back contributes to this process as it can reflect from most of its area very efficiently and the multiple soundholes can be 'tuned' by increasing or decreasing their area and number to balance the tone and kill any resonant peaks.

Finally, the designers have used the soundholes to express their artistic talents and surrounded them with a leaf motif of exotic woods. These epaulets are well known on Adamas and Elite guitars, and also serve the purpose of reinforcing and protecting the 15 variously sized soundholes. The guitar is available in two finish options

(cherry-cherryburst or natural) and is edged with white and red binding.

It's not very often that I find myself 600 words into a review before I get to any detail about the neck, and it is even more surprising since Ovation have focused attention on it by their choice of name! But the truth is that the neck is unremarkable in comparison to the body, except for the fact that it is, er, long. The extra three inches doesn't mean you get any extra



frets - they are just further spaced than usual. The construction is typically Ovation with three pieces of mahogany and two narrow strips of maple enclosing an adjustable trussrod mounted in a substantial 'T' cross-section cast aluminium bar. It will undoubtedly shrug off the ravages of string tension and climatic change with disdain. Should you need to adjust the trussrod, it is accessed through the large circular plate on the back of the body (you can also get at the preamp and electronics or simply marvel at the unorthodox construction through this hole!) The fingerboard is rosewood and has engine-valve shaped fret position markers made of a light coloured wood. It is perfectly straight and the fretting is level and well finished.

In Use Unplugged

Apparently, Larry Coryell and Adrian Legg were asked to put the Long Neck

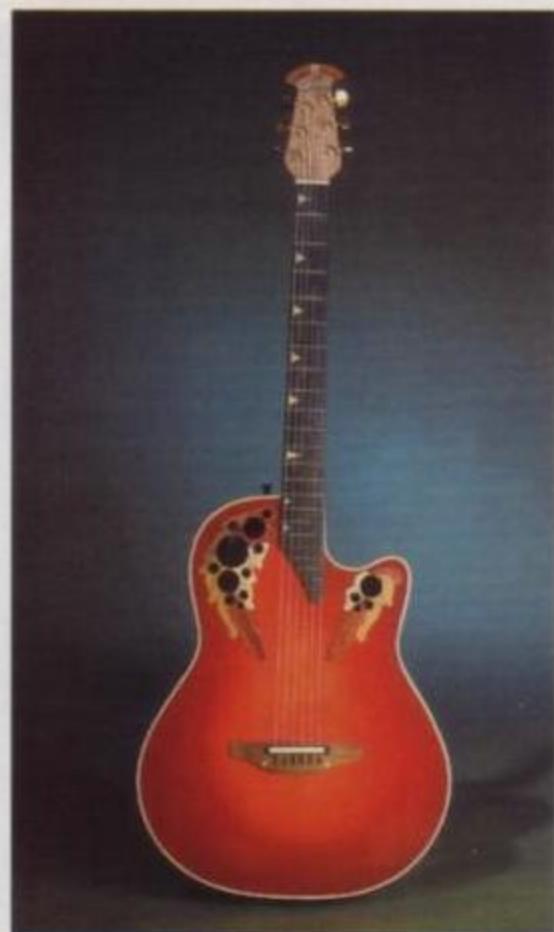
to the test. I wish I had been there to see it, because the potential for inventive playing on this guitar is staggering. Even in a standard dropped tuning to D the possibilities are awe inspiring. You may ask, What's the big deal? I can retune any guitar to D, but I can assure you that the Long Neck just has such a rich, deep and big sound and develops such unexpected tones that the difference is as great as stereo is to mono.

The review guitar was set up with an action of 2.00/1.50mm and was fairly easy to play. The net result of long scale and down-tuning is normal tension, so you feel reasonably comfortable right from the start. You definitely notice the long neck and its substantial slight V dimensions but not half as much as you feel the additional weight of the guitar and size of the body! I felt much more comfortable playing the guitar sitting than standing, as the deep round bowl tends to throw the guitar out at an alarming angle as soon as you rest your forearm on the body. How you pluck, attack or finger the strings

seems to make more difference to the dynamics than on a standard guitar, and if you want it to be more conventional you can whack a capo on the second fret and carry on as normal! In the hands of players adept at alternative tunings, this instrument will be a killer.

Plugged

Ovation have upgraded all electronics in 1995 and the Long Neck is fitted with the new OP-X system. It uses the usual Ovation intonation compensated saddle pickup with a four band EQ preamp and is even more impressive amplified than acoustically. Battery changing could not be simpler through the sliding door on the rim, and a low battery warning light will illuminate when power drops below 7.7 volts. The EQ controls allow you to cut or boost by at least 12dB the low (80Hz), lower mid (600Hz), upper mid (6kHz), and high (10kHz) frequency bands and are extremely effective in tailoring a great



► diversity of sounds. I was pleased to note that just about any idiotic setting on the EQ would still give a usable, clear and undistorted coloration so that even the electronically and aurally challenged will not get out of their depth! And in case you suffer from EQ fatigue after fiddling with sliders for too long, a quick push on the EQ in/out button will restore your sanity with a superb and sensible flat response sound. It is also very useful as a 'compare' facility so you can monitor your adjustments relative to the original tone.

The gain and notch controls are rotary and retractable. If you push and release the knobs they pop up for easy adjustment, then push again to return to the recessed position and prevent them from being accidentally altered. So let's have a quick look at this 'notch' gadget because it really is a valuable feature. It is a type of EQ filter which enables you to cut a very narrow frequency band and it is used to eliminate feedback. When your guitar decides to resonate in sympathy with the unnatural acoustics of the Venue From Hell or have an argument with the Soundman From Hades, you can at last have some control over the situation. Just push the notch in/out button down to switch the circuit on and by slowly turning the notch control (which operates from 70Hz to 700Hz) you can 'tune' the filter to reject the offending frequency. Now raise your right hand and extend two slightly parted fingers in clear line of sight of the mixing desk while uttering the words, Do I have to do *everything* myself around here?

Guitarist July 1995

Conclusion

I have never really been keen on the Ovation sound and prefer traditionally constructed conventional guitars. Hundreds of thousands of people have disagreed with this view and have been buying Ovations since the mid 60s to prove it! Don't you agree that it is all the more remarkable that I should be so glowing in my praise of the Long Neck? The fact is, this is no conventional guitar and the radical design and philosophy really suit this instrument where there are no preconceived ideas, prejudices or previous loves to cloud the issue.

I expect the Long Neck to succeed where so many unusual and innovative designs have failed. It strikes a perfect

SPEC CHECK

Ovation 'Long Neck' SN 487175

Price:	£1,195
Top:	solid spruce
Neck:	mahogany/maple
Fingerboard and bridge:	rosewood
Number of frets:	22 (14th at body)
Scale length:	718mm (28.35")
Fingerboard inlays:	wooden valves!
Neck width at nut:	43mm
Body width:	404mm (15.8")
Body length:	514mm (20.25")
Max body depth:	152mm (6")
Overall length:	1,080mm (42.5")
Pickup/preamp:	OP-X (four band EQ, tunable notch filter, low battery warning)
Machineheads:	gold plated Schaller
Strap buttons:	Jim Dunlop Dual Design Straplok
Case:	yes
Left-handers:	no

Contact: Kaman Music Distribution UK, Maldon, Essex CM9 7GG. Tel: 01621 851555.

balance between being familiar as an almost normal guitar and tonally challenging enough to encourage a whole new approach to one's playing. The manufacture quality of this model is excellent and the price of £1,195 represents outstanding value for money. Ovation are making a small number of Long Necks as an experiment. Only time will tell but I hope and guess that a small number will not be enough! ■