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OF HOWLIN' WOLF'S SHADOW

INSIDE SIMPLE MINDS
WITH CHARLIE BURCHILL

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Review

Czech acoustic maker? That'll be Furch, then. Er, no, there's another outfit from over there beginning to do business over here. Jerry Uwins tries a brace of BSGs and reckons it stands for Blinking Stonking Guitars...

BSG

BSG J15F Jumbo & A27F Pro Acoustics

BSG, actually named after two of its luthier partners, Pavel Bures and Jan Stovicek, operates from a workshop in northern Bohemia, producing around 250 handmade instruments a year. The company was formed only five years ago but Pavel and Jan have 15 years of guitar building under their belt, learning their craft under Czech master luthiers as well as working for big-brand manufacturers including Warwick. Up to now BSG's sales have been in mainland Europe and the US, but a recent canvass of UK retailers has apparently attracted a lot of interest... and, crucially, orders.

The BSG catalogue is based on just five designs – dreadnought, jumbo, grand jumbo, semi-thinline A-PRO and a double-cutaway GLP Blueser – but factor in a liberal choice of timbers, solid-top or all-solid construction and a menu of custom options and the permutations are extensive, to say the least. Prices are enticingly wide-ranging too, from a little over £500 to two grand plus.

J15F

Rather like, say, Avalon, BSG's model designations define the general specification. 'J' is for jumbo, '15' indicates a spruce top with cherry back and sides, and the 'F' suffix stands for all-solid woods (or 'full-solid' in company parlance). With its 16"-wide body the guitar is of the smaller jumbo variety; in fact it could be classed as a mini-jumbo because maximum rim depth is a moderate 110mm, making the guitar feel relatively compact to handle.

Our sample is in standard

specification, but that's not stingy on the cosmetic trim. The ultra-clean European spruce top features a wood-mosaic rosette and has coachlined rosewood purfling, while the similarly bound back, bisected by a wide rosewood centre strip, is a visual tour-de-force of swirly, bookmatched grain. Cherry can be a bland-looking timber, but certainly not here. Up top, the headstock bears a rosewood overlay with matching truss rod cover and tuner buttons; the back of the voluted peghead is also veneered, which is apparently something of a BSG visual trademark. The acid-catalysed polyurethane lacquer – satin up the back of neck, gloss on the body and the front of the headstock – is immaculately applied.

One interesting aspect of the internal construction, which is as laudably tidy as the rest of the instrument, is the use of plain rather than slotted (kerfed) linings. This is something you might tend to associate with cheap guitars, yet BSG considers it superior to the kerfed variety for strength and stability, and they also claim that it demonstrates a higher level of craftsmanship. Along with the anticipated



RRP:
£807

FACTFILE

BSG J15F JUMBO

Description: Jumbo acoustic. Made in Czech Republic

Price: £807 without case

Build: Solid spruce top, solid cherry back and sides. Mahogany neck with 20-fret unbound rosewood fingerboard. Rosewood bridge, chrome mini Schallers with rosewood buttons, bone nut and saddle, two strap buttons

Options: J15 with laminated back/sides (£626). Jumbo comes in various back/side timbers from mahogany J10 (£530 solid top, £644 all-solid) to Rio rosewood J33 (£1348 solid top, £1713 all-solid). Custom menu on request, B-Band or Fishman pickup systems from £97-£179, for cutaway add between £60 and £98 according to style. Hiscox case is £91 extra

Left-hander: Yes, no extra charge

Finish: Gloss body, satin neck

Contact: BSG ☎ 00420 465 613 560

DIMENSIONS

Scale length.....	650 (25.59")
Width of neck	
at nut.....	43
at 12th fret.....	54
Depth of neck	
at 1st fret.....	21
at 9th fret.....	22
String spacing	
at nut.....	36
at bridge.....	55
Action as supplied	
at 12th fret treb.....	2.5
at 12th fret bass.....	2.5
F'board radius (approx).....	10"
Max rim depth.....	110
Max body width.....	407
Weight (kg/lbs).....	2.18/4.8

In mm unless otherwise stated

A27F PRO

Description: shallow-body, cutaway acoustic. Made in Czech Republic

Price: £1217 without case

Build: Solid cedar top, solid rosewood back and sides, Mahogany neck with 24-fret maple-bound ebony fingerboard. Ebony bridge, gold mini Schallers with ebony buttons, bone nut and saddle

Options: A27 in standard spec (walnut binding, chrome tuners) is £1039 all-solid, or £676 with solid (spruce or cedar) top. A-PRO done in various back/side timbers – from mahogany A10 (£548 solid top, £666 all-solid) to Rio rosewood A33 (£1395 solid top, £1772 all-solid). Custom options, pickup systems and case prices as per jumbo

Left-hander: Yes, no extra charge

Finish: Gloss body, satin neck

Web: www.bsguitars.cz

Note: Sterling prices shown may vary

DIMENSIONS

Scale length.....	650 (25.59")
Width of neck	
at nut.....	43.5
at 12th fret.....	53.5
Depth of neck	
at 1st fret.....	20.5
at 9th fret.....	22.5
String spacing	
at nut.....	36
at bridge.....	54.5
Action as supplied	
at 12th fret treb.....	2.5
at 12th fret bass.....	2.5
F'board radius (approx).....	9"
Max rim depth.....	95
Max body width.....	399
Weight (kg/lbs).....	2.1/4.7

In mm unless otherwise stated

RRP:
£1217

internal reinforcing strips around the solid rims is a thin patch of wood on the bass-side upper bout – presumably to provide strengthening should a hole need to be cut for a preamp. Nearby is located the second strap button, screwed into a small packing block on the inside of the shoulder.

The full-scale mahogany neck, which appears to be a one-piece affair, is attached to the body using a Taylor-style bolting system, and carries an unbound, dot-marked rosewood fingerboard with thin well-manicured fretting. Width is regular and the depth quite shallow, giving a slick, fast grip. The nut is nicely cut for good intonation, though I'd prefer a lower string height further up.

This would be achievable to a degree, but there isn't enough break-angle remaining over the saddle to allow a real fret-hugging action. The question of neck pitch therefore arises, though it won't be an issue if you're happy with a medium action.

SOUNDS

Everyone thinks they know what rosewood sounds like, or mahogany... but cherry? Godin uses cherry on some of its Norman and Seagull acoustics but it's not a common guitar wood, and I'm not aware of an archetypal 'cherry' sound. However, it contributes to a fine performance on the J15F. Dynamics are responsive and sustainful, while the fairly bright, faintly breathy tone possesses plenty of grand auditorium-like clarity, reinforced by a sturdy bottom end that supplies a nicely balancing textural warmth. Just the kind of sound, indeed, you'd hope to discover in a good mini-jumbo.

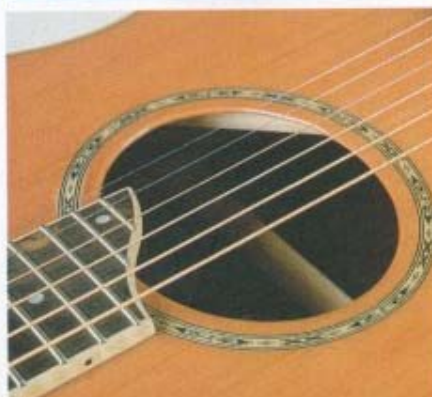
Review



Second strap button Supplied as standard on both guitars, so no drilling decisions to make



Bookmatched cherry The J15's back and sides are finished off a treat by the rosewood binding



Special binding The A27F PRO has custom-order flamed maple bordering body and fingerboard



BSG peghead Rosewood or ebony overlays with matching tuner buttons and truss rod cover

A27F PRO

Like all BSGs the A-PRO is offered in a variety of timbers, but the 'Line 27' version with rosewood back and sides is the most popular. The majority of customers opt to partner this with a cedar top, as per our all-solid-wood review model, though spruce is available at the same price. As a semi-thinline instrument generally requested with a cutaway, the A-PRO is designed very much as a stage guitar and would normally be ordered as an electro-acoustic carrying either a B-Band or Fishman system. However, because our sample was a stock model built for showing to the UK trade, it was shipped here as a pure acoustic.

The A-PRO is a medium-size instrument with a body span of 15.75" and a slim 95mm rim depth; thanks to the style of cutaway and the oval soundhole, the look is reminiscent of a Yamaha APX. The two-octave fingerboard, with the last part-fret overhanging the soundhole on the fingerboard's curlicue end flourish, emphasises the guitar's stage orientation.

In standard acoustic specification the A27F would retail for £1039, but ours sports a few extras. The cutaway is one, and the body and fingerboard's handsome flame-maple binding is another. Another added-cost upgrade is gold rather than chrome tuners, and they carry ebony buttons to match the

fingerboard and bridge. Careful attention to visual co-ordination means an ebony headstock overlay and truss rod cover, though actually these are standard Line 27 features. The rosewood peghead underlay veneer is there, too. Peering inside the guitar reveals no reinforcing patch on the upper rim for a preamp, as the shallower depth probably means more rigid structural stability. The second strap button is sited in the same place as on the jumbo.

Except for a rounded, not pointed heel, the A-PRO's satin-finished mahogany neck is dimensionally a near-ringer for the jumbo's. The feel, however, is subtly different because the fairly flat-backed profile has more of a 'D' radiusing along the shoulders. This makes it seem a touch more electric-like, which fits well with the guitar's general design. Edge bevelling along the binding contributes to a very

comfortable feel, as does the smoothness of the ebony fingerboard. There are no reservations about neck pitch here, because although the action could afford to come down a bit, there's plenty of saddle height at the bridge to allow this – in fact, by the looks of it, a pretty slinky set-up is perfectly feasible.

SOUNDS

Although the A-PRO is classed as having a shallow body, the rim depth actually isn't much skinnier than that of some regular folk acoustics. Nevertheless, the sound of this A27F is a real eye – or I should say – ear opener. There's none of the tonal thinness or brittleness that you often experience with this style of instrument, and in a blindfold test you'd simply regard it as a fully-fledged quality acoustic. Volume issues forth easily and

The A27F's response is vibrant, brightly sweet and cleanly detailed. It's a delightful player

unstintedly, the response is vibrant, brightly sweet and cleanly detailed, and there's no sacrifice of bass response because of the lean design. It's a delightful, expressive player.

The icing on the cake would have been to assess its electro capabilities, but without an installed system that hasn't been possible, and thoughts of temporarily fitting one of my own magnetic soundhole pickups were thwarted because of the incompatible size and shape of the oval aperture. Such is life... but given the guitar's clearly accomplished acoustic abilities, I'd lay money on it sounding superb when fired up, and any of the B-Band or Fishman systems offered by BSG should do very nicely.



VERDICT

It's always a treat to be introduced to an undiscovered guitar maker, and these BSGs are certainly a real find. Workmanship, materials and detailing are of a high calibre, both guitars ooze tasteful class, and they play very well. As for the sound, that's tip-top – especially the A-PRO, because it delivers

much more than you'd expect. All the right ingredients are here, then, and at prices that are extremely keen for this standard of handmade quality. Checking out these Czechs – who'll be happy to point you in the direction of your nearest UK stockist – is a must-do.