



Voyage Air VAD-2 \$2,699

It folds, but how does it sound?
by Kris Petersen

With acoustic guitars there really aren't an amazing number of original ideas throughout history – but then again we are talking about an acoustic guitar. The test of time has allowed this instrument to remain relatively untouched as a perfect example of the 'if it ain't broke don't fix it' mantra.

However, in recent times, the need for instruments that are portable has become more demanding. The travelling musician is always confronted with the unnerving experience of checking their guitars into oversize baggage and then praying they will be waiting on the other side in one piece (we all know United break guitars, can't say we've heard that Virgin and Qantas are better).

We then come across a relatively unknown concept in acoustic guitar manufacturing. Based out of California, Harvey Leach laid the foundations of Voyage Air guitars in 1972. As a luthier first and foremost, the search for his point of difference, while remaining pure to the traditionalist within, helped him to create a truly unique concept for the travelling musician.

Our adventure with Voyage Air guitars began before we

even opened the box. Arriving in what appeared to be a 2 x 12 combo box, the Voyage Air guitar was delivered folded down and snug in its case. The

case itself consists of two sections. The main guitar bag includes a tough contoured outer shell and a detachable manuscript/laptop/leads bag.

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When this is removed, the remaining guitar would quite comfortably fit in overhead storage on an aircraft.

Folded down, the hinge is exposed at the 14th fret and sits directly under the rosewood fingerboard. The entire neck joint has actually been cut through and rejoined via a single pin and a hand tightening screw that doubles as a strap join. While this probably sounds extremely odd, when the guitar is once again in one piece, the join isn't noticeable, visually or when being played.

While the majority of the guitar appears to be a well crafted instrument consisting of a solid sitka spruce top, a solid rosewood back and sides, a rosewood fingerboard, and an abalone centre ring, a fret



Think of how amazed the ground staff will be when they force you to open this at the airport!



It folds in half! And it doesn't affect the tuning! Or the sound!

"The Voyage Air has really challenged what we previously believed constituted a good acoustic guitar."

marker is the only indication that the VAD-2's alter ego is the nut. Unlike standard acoustic guitars, the nut is subtly higher which allows the strings to be fed straight through it instead of sitting on top. While this seems a little strange, and a minor issue when restringing, the nut keeps movement on the machine heads minimal therefore improving tuning stability when the guitar is folded down for transport.

Sounds

Traditional thinking would suggest that a guitar that has had a clear cut through the entire neck at the 14th fret

would sound pretty average. The flow on effect on the tone and sustain would be devastating – or so one would think. We were extremely surprised on the first strum of this instrument. Our preconceptions about how it might sound were not only challenged but completely destroyed. This guitar sounds great! There is a noticeable clarity in the bottom end that you would expect to find in the highest of quality acoustic instruments. Every note and chord is fat but also clear.

The higher frequencies on this guitar are very rich, and while this is a great thing when

playing unplugged, it could cause some feedback issues if you were to install a pickup.

The real test on this acoustic came when comparing different techniques. We noticed that although we were changing the way we played the guitar, the guitar didn't really dictate how it should be played. We find that many acoustic guitars will indicate the best technique to use for its tone and what sort of player it would feel at home with. The Voyage Air seemed to fit right into any style and technique quite comfortably. The relatively low action for a 12 – 54 string gauge made it a real breeze to play and there was never any hint of fretting out or weird and wonderful buzzing.

Sustain was one of our big questions here. We are all aware that every part of the wood plays a vital role in the sound of a guitar. Cutting the neck and fret board in half and replacing it with a hinge obviously concerned us a little – however when playing the Voyage Air, there is absolutely no loss of sustain.

This instrument rings out, holds the wave form and projects just as a top quality acoustic (in one piece) would. It is a real testament to Harvey Leech as a luthier. While the Voyage Air has a definite point of difference, its primary role as an instrument has not been sacrificed.

Verdict

As far as acoustic guitars go, the Voyage Air is a great instrument. It has everything you would expect of a guitar in its price range and more. While the folding down of the guitar would appear to be a gimmick, the quality of the tones created and the craftsmanship gives it a clear advantage over other acoustics in its class.

The Voyage Air has really challenged what we previously believed constituted a good acoustic guitar. Having the ability to fold an acoustic in half to make it more portable is a clear cut advantage for the travelling musician. The fact that the guitar sounds and plays great as well makes this one instrument that you have to check out. **G**



The Bottom Line

We like: It's pretty obvious!

We dislike: No pickup as standard

Guitarist Says:

Preconceptions don't apply here. Try before you judge

Voyage Air VAD-2

PRICE: \$2,699 (inc custom case)

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Traditional full-sized dreadnought body design

TOP: Solid Sitka Spruce Top

BODY: Solid Rosewood Back and Sides with grained Ivoroid body binding

NECK: "C"-shaped Mahogany

SCALE LENGTH: 25.5"

FINGERBOARD: Rosewood

FRETS: Premium Nickel-Silver

SADDLE: Bone

HARDWARE: Patented Voyage-Air Neck Hinge, Includes Deluxe

"Voyager" Carrying Case

RANGE OPTIONS: 2 models in songwriter series, 4 in the premier series including cutaways

Allegrity Pty Ltd

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www.voyageairguitar.com

Test results

Build quality	★★★★★
Playability	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★