



A NO-FRET SOLUTION TO TAKING YOUR GUITAR ON THE ROAD

VOYAGE-AIR'S TRAVEL GUITAR IS A FULL-SIZE INSTRUMENT THAT FOLDS AND STOWS

by PRESTON GRATIOT

Guitars have always found a place alongside the campfire. No matter if strummed by a lonely cowboy to calm restless dogies during a cattle drive across the plains, or picked by a modern-day RVer leading a pack of two-legged young'uns in song under a crisp, starry sky. Yup, the guitar has earned a traditional place in the camping lifestyle that cannot be ignored. However, not everyone is ready to take up valuable space inside the motorhome to store a full-sized acoustic guitar.

Luckily, guitar makers have recently developed special "travel guitars" designed to make taking your guitar on the road much less of a hassle or liability. Although many of these more compact designs feature a full-size neck for easy playing, most balance the need for portability with a lack of tone or volume. Even a talented builder is met with a monumental task when trying to get a big sound out of a smaller guitar.

Granted, the larger "dreadnought" style of acoustic guitar produces the best combination of tone and volume for a campfire singalong. But with portability and storage a major factor in transporting the instrument, a new design was called for so your road guitar could sound like the treasured instrument that serves as your main guitar at home — yet still be compact enough to fit inside your motorhome.

Voyage-Air Guitar co-founders Harvey Leach and Jeff Cohen didn't accept the restrictions of rich tone versus portability as an unavoidable problem, and struck out to engineer this rather drastic solution, thanks to luthier Harvey Leach's 35 years of guitar-building ingenuity. The end result is the VAD-04, a unique, full-size guitar with a fold-and-stow design that allows for storage in small spaces.

Leach's solution for making a full-size guitar fit in small compartments hinged on an extremely strong neck joint that allows the player to simply loosen a single securing bolt and then fold the guitar in half — pivoting the neck forward so the fretboard lays flat against the guitar's top. While stored in the case, the securing strap acts as a buffer between the neck and bridge, minimizing any chance of damage during transit.

If you are really into guitar construction, you know how players can argue over how the neck joint design can enhance, hinder or maximize the tone of the guitar, and Voyage-Air's hinged-neck design may seem to fall on the negative



PHOTOS: BOB LIVINGSTON

A NO-FRET SOLUTION TO TAKING YOUR GUITAR ON THE ROAD

side of this argument. But the VAD-04 will easily fool many players as the neck joint both looks and feels solid.

Folding the Voyage-Air in half is easy thanks to the unique double hinge. Simply twist the heel-mounted screw, which doubles as a strap pin, and the neck releases from the neckblock. However, be forewarned because string tension can swing the neck away from the heel with a slight jolt if you're not prepared. I found the best way to control the neck motion was to brace the guitar's body — strings facing me — against my chest with my right arm and loosen the nut holding the joint together with my right hand while holding the upper part of the neck with my left hand. The trick is to hold the neck joint closed until after the mounting screw clears the threads.

Returning the guitar to a playable configuration again is no major feat, but those used to treating guitars gently may be leery of the force required to overcome string tension. However, after a few successful transformations, you'll be amazed at just how simple this design is. While folding and unfolding the guitar may require a minor re-tuning, the guitar often remained in tune even after being folded in half.

The neck hinge isn't the only technical feature on the Voyage-Air. The Corian nut (tuner end of the neck) uses small ports rather than the typical slots (the manufacturer refers to this component as the "proprietary captured nut") to hold each string in place while the guitar is folded over and stored in its case. Voyage-Air overcame the limitations of this nut design by incorporating a zero fret — a feature that's uncommon in contemporary steel-string design, but I've got some older collector



guitars with this feature and stand behind this design as an easy way to maintain playability while retaining string alignment.

The Voyage-Air VAD-04 featured here (the company makes more than a dozen models ranging in price from \$399 to \$1,995, depending on body style and trim options) offers roving guitarists a traditional full-size dreadnought design. There is a hand-inlaid rosette around the sound hole and six-ply alternating black-and-white-striped purfling on the edges of the main body that complement the one-piece spruce top. The neck, sides and back of the body feature African mahogany, a tonewood that enhances warmth and low-end sonic response while still allowing the higher notes to ring crisp and clear. The matte finish on the neck helps to keep your palm from sticking to the back of the neck, while the body of the guitar has a highly polished gloss finish that enhances the depth and beauty of the mahogany's grain and color.

The VAD-04 comes with a soft case that protects the guitar in its folded configuration. In addition, the case features a removable laptop/storage case.

Passing the guitar around the room at a recent jam session, few players had any idea that this full-size acoustic guitar was a true shape shifter. The folding neck seam, located between the 13th and 14th frets, went totally unnoticed until I finally



got the guitar back, loosened the securing nut and folded the VAD-04 in half. Suddenly, everyone wanted to play it again.

As an avid guitar player and frequent RVer who also spends a fair amount of time traveling around on work assignments, I have found that this VAD-04, and all of the other guitars in the Voyage-Air line, offers an easy solution to the usual problems I face when trying to bring a full-size, full-scale guitar along for the ride. Besides, it's fun to hear the gasps around the campfire as you break your guitar down to take it back inside your motorhome. ♦

FOR MORE INFORMATION

VOYAGE-AIR GUITAR
800-371-6478,
www.voyageairguitar.com.



CAMPFIRE COMMON SENSE

One of the true joys of taking your guitar on the road is playing it alongside a crackling campfire. However, most guitars are made of wood and wood will expand or contract depending on the temperature. If this happens too fast, the clear finish on the guitar may develop cracks, while in a worst-case scenario, the heat of the fire might even loosen the glue joints, leading to expensive repairs. If you are taking the guitar out of a warm motorhome and settling down at a winter campfire, bring it outside earlier in the evening and let it sit in the case. And don't play the guitar too close to a roaring bonfire. If the fire feels hot on your face, it's probably too hot for the guitar, too. During the day, keep your guitar in the shade. Remember, if you are comfortable with the temperature, it should be fine for the guitar too.