


CHINA IN YOUR HAND

LOUIS THORNE GETS TO GRIPS WITH A SPRUCE AND ROSEWOOD ELECTRO-ACOUSTIC FROM THE FAR EAST. DOES THIS OZARK HIT THE MARK?

GBINFO



OZARK DELUXE 3775

PRICE: £495

BUILT IN: China

SCALE LENGTH: 645mm (25.4 inches)

NUT WIDTH: 43mm (1.69 inches)

STRING SPACING AT NUT: 35mm (1.38 inches)

TOP: Solid spruce

BACK & SIDES: Solid rosewood

NECK: Mahogany

FINGERBOARD: Rosewood, 305mm radius (12 inches)

FRETS: 21 medium

BRIDGE: Rosewood

STRING SPACING AT BRIDGE: 55mm (2.17 inches)

ELECTRONICS: Artec AGE-TN preamp with 3-band EQ, presence and volume controls; undersaddle piezo transducer

MACHINEHEADS: Generic, gold

CASE: Hard case included

WEIGHT: 5kg (11lbs)

FINISHES: Natural gloss

LEFT-HANDERS: No

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The days when the words “made in China” signified a low-quality instrument are long-gone. We know that we keep saying it, but that’s because it’s true: build quality, materials used and factory consistency keep getting better and better, and the end result is that more and more people can afford a decent guitar.

A case in point is this Ozark 3775 electro-acoustic guitar. It comes from the top of Ozark’s Deluxe range and has the sort of specifications that befit such a position – a solid top, back and sides, gold hardware and a hard case – and you won’t have to part with a wallet-eviscerating amount of cash to get hold of one.

BODY & NECK

The 3775 features a solid spruce top with scalloped X-bracing, a solid rosewood back and sides and a mahogany neck – classic attributes for a quality acoustic guitar. It’s always pleasing to see all-solid timbers on a guitar below the £500, and this example looks very well put together.

The top has an even grain and features a very nicely executed rosette of concentric black and white circles with an inlaid herringbone design that is also used on the binding at the body’s edge. A peek into the soundhole reveals some neatly shaped

bracing that tapers towards the body edge, and an attractive little wooden ‘Ozark Deluxe, Stentor Music’ nameplate, lest you should forget who made the thing.

The rosewood back and sides, cream binding and pale spruce top tick the required aesthetic boxes, and all-in-all lend a certain air of opulence to the guitar. We say “all-in-all” because upon closer inspection there are a couple of minor cosmetic blemishes that seem at odds with the neat rosette and classy appointments. On this example there’s some scruffy lacquer build-up where the fingerboard meets the top of the guitar and some small bits of dirt underneath the finish.

The guitar’s rosewood bridge features an intonation-compensated saddle, and we’re happy to report that the 3775 stays well in tune right up the neck. The neck itself is mahogany and reassuringly chunky, with a fairly contemporary rounded D shape. It feels comfortable in the hand, although the gloss finish won’t suit those of us who prefer a less sticky satin finish. The gently cambered rosewood fingerboard features some very neat inlays and 21 properly seated and finished medium-sized frets, while the lower body cutaway means that top fret access is considerably easier than on a non-cutaway guitar, with at least an extra five frets before any contortions are necessary.



PLUGGING IN

INSIDE THE ON-BOARD PREAMP

■ The Ozark Deluxe 3775 features a built-in active preamp designed and built by Artec Sound.

Artec is a South Korean company that manufactures a range of pickups and preamps for acoustic guitars. The Artec product catalogue includes active and passive systems, piezo undersaddle pickups, magnetic soundhole pickups and pickup-plus-mic blender systems. They even produce some acoustic preamps with built-in delay, phaser or chorus effects. The preamp on this guitar – model AGE-TN – features volume, treble, middle, bass and presence sliders and a chromatic tuner. Head over to www.artecsound.com for more information on the range.



■ The herringbone binding around the body and soundhole lends this guitar a real sense of style



“THE 3775 RINGS OUT WITH A WELL-BALANCED AND PLEASING TONE”



The 3775's headstock is a rather unusual shape – we'll let you make up your own minds about this one – and has been given a rosewood veneer to match the body. It sports a sextet of generic gold tuners and a tasteful Ozark logo. Although the nut slots have been properly cut in terms of height, the spacing of the strings at the nut is a little uneven. This, together with the aforementioned cosmetic blemishes, suggests that the quality control at the Ozark factory is a little inconsistent, so it would be worth looking at a few examples before settling on one. Nevertheless, the guitar's action is set quite low, making for a comfortable and buzz-free playing experience.



ELECTRONICS

An undersaddle piezo pickup provides the signal for the guitar's preamp, which in this case is an Artec system. This allows control over volume, bass, middle, treble and presence, and features a built-in chromatic tuner with an LED display. The latter is clear and easy to use, and if you should absentmindedly leave it switched on, a blinking green light reminds you to press the off button.

A 9V battery slots into the preamp

housing and is easy enough to get to when it needs changing. The centre-notched volume and EQ sliders provide up to 12dB of cut or boost, and they feel as though they will withstand plenty of use as long as they're treated with reasonable care.

The preamp section of an electro-acoustic guitar is often the ugliest bit, and this particular example is no exception. The black plastic control panel occupies a large proportion of the upper shoulder, punching a big hole in that lovely solid rosewood. While the preamp does its job (and the tuner in particular is a very useful plus point here), it's not the most discrete or good-looking unit out there, and we can't help feeling that it detracts somewhat from the 'deluxe' feel of the rest of the guitar.

SOUNDS

Strum the 3775 and its D'Addario EXP strings ring out with a well-balanced and pleasing tone. It's what you might describe as articulate, with good note separation that helps chords to sound clear and coherent. Typically for an acoustic with a smaller body and a cutaway, the 3775 has a slightly boxy sound that doesn't offer much in the way of bass. However, this is arguably an advantage for those of us with rather overbearing thumbs, and the guitar's sweet mids lend themselves well to fingerpicking in front of a mic in the studio.

There isn't masses of acoustic volume on offer, but the friendly low action and compact body make the 3775 feel like an ideal 'songwriter's guitar' – we can just imagine sitting ➤

DETAILS

ALL-SOLID WOODS AND SOME TASTY LOOKS ON A BUDGET



■ The intonation-adjusted bridge keeps the tuning accurate all the way up the fretboard



■ The string spacing on our review model's nut is uneven, though the height is fine



■ The 'snowflake' fret markers are a traditional touch and are inlaid perfectly



GBOPINION

OZARK 3775 DELUXE

GOLD STARS

- ★ Solid top, back & sides
- ★ Effective preamp with tuner
- ★ Great playability

BLACK MARKS

- Some minor cosmetic flaws
- A little lacking in volume and low-end

IDEAL FOR...

Anyone looking for a mid-priced, well-appointed electro-acoustic



■ The excess lacquer around the edge of the fretboard is a minor cosmetic flaw

on the sofa at home working on a new number. The sound feels generally quite restrained and compressed though, and this is a guitar that definitely lends itself more to refined plucking and picking as opposed to really letting rip with some hard strumming as you might on a dreadnought or jumbo.

At a gig or rehearsal the pickup system will come into play, and while

the Ozark's Artec preamp is not going to fool anyone into thinking that the guitar is miked-up, the piezo sounds are nonetheless good. Once again the bass is slightly lacking, but this can be rectified with a little bit of judicious EQ. There are some pretty harsh sounds available if you push the treble and presence sliders all the way up, but to its credit the 3775 sounds pretty good with everything set flat. The Ozark's fairly restrained character is also carried over into its amplified voice and whether this suits you or not will depend on your tastes and playing style. Who knows? You might find that the guitar's limited dynamic range actually helps to smooth out the sound of your playing. Others might wish for a touch more liveliness and character.

GBRATINGS

OZARK 3775 DELUXE

BODY & NECK	★★★★☆
HARDWARE & PARTS	★★★★☆
PLAYABILITY	★★★★☆
SOUNDS	★★★★☆
VALUE FOR MONEY	★★★★☆
GBVERDICT	★★★★☆

GBCONCLUSION

A COMPACT ALL-ROUND PERFORMER

■ **Notwithstanding the minor cosmetic flaws on this example (and we're sure that you'll be able to avoid these in the shop as long as you keep an eye out for the things we've highlighted), the 3775 Deluxe is a great-looking and very well made guitar that gives a very enjoyable strum both unplugged and amplified.**

It's a little weak on unplugged volume and low-end compared with some electro-acoustics, but this isn't necessarily a disadvantage. The overall tone is mellow and musical, with good note separation for finger-picking and chords. The chromatic tuner and included hard case are extra plus points, and in front of a mic in the studio, as a songwriter's strumming companion or plugged into a PA, this is a very respectable guitar at this price. **GB**