



GRETSCH G5021WPE RANCHER PENGUIN PARLOR

£480

Time to p-p-pick up a penguin?

We love guitars. A lot. We wouldn't be here otherwise, but sometimes in the acoustic world, things can feel a little... traditional and predictable. Or maybe not, actually, as new products at NAMM last month (see p44) suggest there's still plenty of innovation afoot, and then there's this... something very different from the usual spruce tops and rootsy satin finishes. But is it more stunner than strummer?

Well, let's take those looks in first. This is the acoustic offshoot of a classic Gretsch electric model; the original White Penguin combines the gold bling of its

friendly for both younger and female players.

Parlours are traditionally mid-heavy in tonal character and Gretsch makes no claims otherwise, but there's more at play with this guitar. The highs are bright and clear with a resonance that won't yield to make this a mid-dominant boxy affair. You're never going to get a parlour that's a boomer in the low-end but the bass notes have enough resonance to offer much more of a full-bodied sound that is dynamic for fingerpicking.

On a model at this price point we see Fishman electronics in the spec and we expect the streamlined controls of the

WONDERFUL INTONATION AND A SILKY LOW ACTION

Falcon model with the slimmer shape of the Duo Jet. But in its acoustic form this bird is a Rancher Parlor model. The gold binding, hardware and that 'hello there!' headstock will turn some people off, but in Gretsch's capable hands it really feels like something from a classic age that could have hung on the wall in Graceland. But its nod to the electric model that birthed it goes further than just cosmetics.

A maple body is rather usual in the acoustic world, so it's the neck here that really strikes us. With a wonderful intonation and silky low action, it's also fairly heavy and that substantial feel, coupled with the white lacquer gives it the air of an electric. And as we play we start to see a wider appeal for this than existing Gretsch fans; not only could it be a great transition from electric but the smaller body is also

Sonitone system, but instead we have the Isys III – that means three-band EQ and a useful in-built tuner. Even better news is that it really does the all-rounder sound of the Penguin justice through our Laney A1+ combo – it could give some electro dreadnoughts we've tried a run for their money!

This is a guitar that makes more than just a visual statement; it doesn't sound like a small guitar, and it doesn't play like a gimmick. Instead, you're actually getting a very satisfying acoustic for the money here. Snow joke.

Rob Laing

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| SUMMARY | FEATURES | ★ | ★ | ★ | ★ | ★ |
| | SOUND QUALITY | ★ | ★ | ★ | ★ | ★ |
| | VALUE FOR MONEY | ★ | ★ | ★ | ★ | ★ |
| | BUILD QUALITY | ★ | ★ | ★ | ★ | ★ |
| | PLAYABILITY | ★ | ★ | ★ | ★ | ★ |
| | OVERALL RATING | ★ | ★ | ★ | ★ | ★ |

1 SOUNDHOLE
The distinctive, smaller soundhole encourages the dynamic of bringing more or less of that low-end as you're playing chords by playing closer or further from it

2 BINDING
The Penguin's plumage is enhanced by the gold sparkle neck and body binding with a gold plexi scratchplate. And those fingerboard inlays? Gretsch calls it a neo-classic 'thumbnail' style

3 NECK
The Penguin is neck heavy on the strap and the weightier maple construction could be a contributing factor in its resonance; maple is a tonewood known for its brighter character

AT A GLANCE

TYPE: Parlour-size electro-acoustic
TOP: Solid spruce
BACK AND SIDES: Laminated maple
NECK: Mahogany
SCALE: 635mm (25")
FRETS: 20
TUNERS: Deluxe die-cast
ELECTRICS: Fishman Isys III system with active onboard preamp and tuner; volume, bass, mid, treble controls
FINISH: Gloss
CONTACT: Fender Musical Instruments 01342 331700
 gretschguitars.com

