

MARTIN OMC-28E £2299

ELECTRO-ACOUSTIC  GUITARIST INTERACTIVE



Martin OMC-28E £2,299

The rivals

Lakewood M-32CP £1,739
Larrivée OMV-09 from £1,995
Taylor 712CE £2,749
Lakewood's Deluxe Series M-32CP is a wide-neck auditorium with the new hybrid Sonic blender system of an under-saddle Shadow Nanoflex pickup and under-neck Nanomag humbucker with soundhole controls. Larrivée's Artist Series OMV-09 has a 44.5mm nut width and includes abalone rosette and multi-ply wood purflings. Allow extra for LR Baggs powering, for example an I-Beam Active endpin system at £175. The 712CE grand concert from Taylor, likewise with a semi-wide neck, is a shorter-scale (632mm) alternative, powered by the multi-body-sensor Expression System. All are spruce/rosewood with cutaway.

Old meets new as this medium-bodied design gets the latest in Fishman Aura wizardry **by Jim Chapman**

In the same way as one person's concert acoustic is another's grand concert, so the OM Orchestral category can be open to interpretation as far as size is concerned. Some makers consider the name suggestive of a larger-bodied instrument than a 000 auditorium and design accordingly. OM creator Martin, however, as our inset describes, adopted the simple expedient of taking its existing 000 body style and adding a longer scale length and two extra frets clear of the body. The result, then as now, was better access and playability, but incorporated in a design that remained quite compact to handle.

With upper fret reach enhanced by its Venetian cutaway, compactness is

MARTIN OMC-28E	TEST RESULTS
Build quality	★★★★★
Playability	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★
■ WE LIKED Ease of use of virtual mic images; excellent sounds; comfy neck	
■ WE DISLIKED Slightly scratchy fret tops	

something that readily comes across on the OMC-28E. Span across the Sitka spruce/Indian rosewood body isn't much over 381mm (15-inches), and maximum rim depth is a relatively shallow 102mm. That, however, is well proportioned to the overall body size and, constructionally, means that the internal rim-reinforcing strips that you'd normally find on an all-solid-

wood guitar aren't deemed necessary.

Cosmetics on present-day Style 28 Martins aren't as lavish as vintage examples (or reissues), indeed they're more functional than decorative. Body purfling and rosette, for example, are done in multi-ply white/black plastic, and the striped-ebony fingerboard's position markers are simple pearl dots. One concession to visual fanciness is the back's wood-mosaic centre strip. Everything is immaculately applied and set off well by the body's finely buffed gloss lacquering.

Secured by a glued dovetail joint, not the bolt-on system used on most lower-series Martins, the OMC-28E's one-piece mahogany neck conforms to the traditional OM width of 44.5mm across →



The Ellipse Aura shows how far virtual mic blender systems have come



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PHOTOGRAPHY GAVIN ROBERTS

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ELECTRO-ACOUSTIC  GUITARIST INTERACTIVE

MARTIN OMC-28E

PRICE: £2,299
(inc case)

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Cutaway
orchestral electro-
acoustic

TOP: Solid spruce

BACK/SIDES: Solid
rosewood

MAX RIM DEPTH:
102mm

MAX BODY WIDTH:
386mm

NECK: Mahogany

SCALE LENGTH:
645mm

TUNERS: Chrome
Gotohs

NUT/WIDTH: Bone/
44.5mm

FINGERBOARD: Bound
striped ebony, 356mm
radius

FRETS: 20, thin

BRIDGE/SPACING:
Striped ebony with Tusq
saddle/57mm

ELECTRICS: Under-
saddle pickup; Fishman
Ellipse Aura preamp with
volume, blend, sound
image select (1-4),
phase, EQ flat/bass-
boost switch, anti-
feedback on/off,
feedback frequency
'measure', preamp level
trim pot, battery status
LED, internal holder
pouch for 9V lithium or
alkaline battery

WEIGHT (kg/lb):
2.04/4.5

OPTIONS: The other
Ellipse Aura-equipped
debut is the spruce/
rosewood DC-28E
cutaway dreadnought
(£2,299). Also try the
similarly timbered OMC-
16RE Aura with Onboard
Aura at £1,999

LEFT-HANDERS: To
order, no extra cost

FINISH: Gloss natural
body, satin neck

Westside Distribution
0141 248 4812

www.martinguitar.com

The acoustic traits are sympathetically conveyed via the under-bridge pickup, while blending in the sound images successfully layers more complex mic-ambient textures

→ the nut. This puts us in fingerstyle territory straight away, more so when you factor in the fingerboard's significant broadening, where the span at the octave is a fairly uncompromising 57mm. That's pretty wide, but remarkably the neck doesn't feel deterringly plank-like thanks to its fairly shallow profile. In fact it's surprisingly comfortable for general playing, and of course excellent for picking workouts. One minor criticism is that, when string bending, we noted our sample's slightly scratchy fret tops could use a more thorough polishing.

A significant facet of the OMC-28E is it being one of the first Martin electros to carry Fishman's new Ellipse Aura blender system. Ellipse signifies that the preamp with its control panel is mounted non-invasively under the bass-side rim of the soundhole; the Aura aspect proves to be a simplified version of the Onboard Aura. Where the latter has six digitally converted mic-recorded sound images that are editable, the Ellipse offers four preset ones that, along with the under-saddle pickup signal, are only EQ'able by a bass-boost switch. Both preamps, however, share a uniqueness in that their images are created with the same model of instrument that the respective system is fitted to. In other words, the images here – involving four different types of mic and either near or close positioning – were taken from recordings of another OM-28.

For practical and space reasons the Ellipse Aura sacrifices the Onboard's tuner, but does include that unit's preamp level trim pot and its switchable, feedback search-and-destroy facility. This could be used on the hoof, but the button-pressing procedure involved and the hidden location of the controls mean it's more viable to set it up in advance of a performance by provoking the guitar into feedback and letting the circuitry do its stuff. It works.

SOUNDS: This OM performs a treat in both roles. Acoustically the tone is sprightly and taut, yet simultaneously the dynamics feel supple and responsive, which nicely exploit the instrument's inherently excellent clarity and sweet-edged follow-through. Volume and projection aren't shy for the body size either, and there's



OM Origins

First made in 1929 though not catalogued until the following year, Martin's Orchestral Model was inspired not by guitarists but by a banjo player, one Perry Bechtel of Atlanta, Georgia. Like Bechtel, many plectrum banjoists were switching to guitar but needed better high-fret access than that allowed by the ubiquitous 12-frets-to-the-body designs of the period. The OM was hence given 14 frets clear of the body, making it the first regular-production six-string acoustic in Martin's line to be so specified. Appropriately perhaps, early OMs – the first being a handful of OM-28s including Bechtel's own instrument – carried banjo peg tuners, not guitar machineheads.

In size the OM was, and remains, essentially the same as the medium-bodied 000 auditorium, but one distinguishing feature is that where most

000s use a 633mm (24.9-inch) scale length, the OM's is the longer 645mm (25.4-inch). This scale difference was the only major change between the early OM Series and the 14-fret 000s that succeeded it in 1934. (12-fret 000s had already been in production since 1902.)


Having been discontinued, OMs weren't again produced in any significant numbers until the late seventies, and then only in upmarket Style 45 trim. A more affordable Style 28 was added in 1990. Things are very different today, with Martin currently offering nearly 30 OMs, from Style 15 upwards and including various cutaway electros and signature models. Another differentiation between 000 and OMs – though in a catalogue as diverse as Martin's there are, unsurprisingly, exceptions which break the rule – is that the former tend to have 42.9mm nut widths while the latter almost always carry the wider 44.5mm fingerstyle neck.

pleasant underpinning of rosewoody warmth in the low end.

The Ellipse Aura expresses all this very convincingly when powered up. The acoustic traits are sympathetically conveyed via the under-bridge pickup, while blending in the sound images successfully layers more complex mic-ambient textures. Voicing-wise, each image is different – one a little sparklier, another more mid forward, yet another a bit warmer and so on – and it's entirely a matter of personal taste which will be preferred. Importantly they all sound good and miles more tolerant to higher blend ratios than any real mic blender system you'll have experienced, especially the internal gooseneck variety. Bass boost is perhaps a shade too subtle, but the absence of any other onboard EQ is not a problem because all the sounds are so well tempered to start off with. Any

radical tailoring – unlikely to be needed – can be done at the backline end of things.

Verdict

Having already tried a Martin jumbo fitted with an Onboard Aura and been impressed, we're no less sold on the Ellipse Aura despite its pared-down spec. Martin has led the field with installing these innovative Fishman systems as original equipment and the smart money predicts that virtual mic blender systems like the Auras will eventually become the norm. Why? Because they're a whole lot more user-friendly and, arguably, sound better! Oh, and before we forget, the OMC-28E is a great little picker, an ideal partner to its powering. 

Martin OMC-28E

Guitarist RATING

★★★★★