

FIRST PLAY



DANELECTRO 60TH ANNIVERSARY '59M NOS+
£549

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WHAT IS IT? Jimmy Page's favourite budget axe gets its bus pass...



DANELECTRO '64XT
£699

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WHAT IS IT? A vintage surf classic that never actually existed

Golden Years

If your dreams of owning a vintage classic are still a nose print on the music store window, meet two Danelectro models that might just scratch that itch. And one of them is celebrating its birthday...

Words Ed Mitchell **Photography** Neil Godwin

In 1959, an electric guitar was born that would change the world. A triumph of innovative design, this thing would pass through the hands of rock stars like Eric Clapton and Jimmy Page. It ascended to icon status in its own right, an instrument that doesn't look, sound or feel like anything else.

At this point, you're likely picturing the '59 Gibson Les Paul Standard. The infamous £250k 'Bursts'. Joe Bonamassa's pension pot. Not so fast... You see, 1959 was also the year that saw the arrival of the Danelectro 3021 Shorthorn. If ever a guitar got ideas above its station, it's this double-cutaway, low-budget classic. Envisioned by guitar, er, visionary Nathan Daniel, the 3021 extracted the maximum rock-star-baiting tone from the humblest of materials.

The man's ideas had legs. Nat's 3021 model is still going strong, albeit better known these days as the '59 or '59DC. The 60th Anniversary '59M NOS+ version that just landed on our doorstep has been tasked with blowing out the candles on Danelectro's behalf. It even comes dressed for the occasion in a special Deep Blue Metalflake





1. Both of these new Dano models offer excellent playability thanks to a shallow D neck profile and 355mm (14-inch) fingerboard radius. The 'board timber is rosewood substitute pau ferro. The fret size is medium, and both guitars have 21 of the little blighters

2. We'd love to see a hardtail version of the '64XT, but we had a great time getting acquainted with this model's Wilkinson vibrato. This might look like a vintage guitar, but the floating Wilkinson allows you to warble and dive-bomb like a modern Superstrat...

outfit. Whether we'll be wishing it many happy returns remains to be seen.

In classic Dano style, our Anniversary '59M NOS+ has a semi-hollow body featuring a hardwood frame capped front and back with sheets of Masonite (which we know as hardboard). This "engineered wood" was a popular DIY bodge in the 60s and 70s when it was used to obliterate period features in Victorian houses. Nathan Daniel put it to much better use, and our 60th Anniversary model also features a pair of the man's iconic Lipstick tube single-coil pickups. Other Dano period features include the aluminium top nut, 21 frets, not to mention the Liquorice Allsorts-vibe concentric volume and tone controls.

There are some intentional discrepancies from the original blueprint. Back in the day, the bolt-on maple neck would've come topped with a rosewood fingerboard. Here, like many contemporary manufacturers of sub-£1,000 guitars, Danelectro has switched its allegiance to the more eco-friendly pau ferro. This 60th Anniversary guitar also has a painted neck; original Dano necks are natural.

The biggest departure from the classic 3021 spec sheet is the Badass style wrap-around bridge. This chunky customer pays tribute to the modification Jimmy Page had made to his famous black Shorthorn. For

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this new model, Danelectro has recessed the bridge into the body, presumably to achieve a lower action. This mod is effective but not particularly pleasing to the eye. We can't help feeling shimming the neck would have been a better idea.

The 60th Anniversary '59M NOS+ is joined here by the new '64XT. Let's decipher these model designation codes, Alan Turing style. 'M' simply means modified. In other words, while you get the classic two Lipstick pickup format, M guitars feature the aforementioned Jimmy Page-style bridge mod. If you want a vintage-spec Shorthorn with the old-school wooden bridge saddle, check out the 'Stock '59' code guitars.

'X'-marked Danos are spec'd with a modern double Lipstick tube humbucker at the bridge and a big neck-position single coil that looks like the pups fitted to Mosrite guitars. 'T' stands for tremolo, the timeworn and ever-incorrect term for a vibrato unit.



Now that we're all experts on Danelectro model numbers, it should come as no surprise that our '64XT has the modern pickup arrangement and a silky smooth and floating Wilkinson vibrato clinging to its carcass. Oh, and don't let the '64XT's body shape fool you. That cool reverse offset profile might be lifted from Danelectro's Mosrite-inspired '64, '66 and Hodad models, but underneath its 3-Tone Sunburst finish lurks the same hardwood skeleton and Masonite caps that helped make the 3021 a rock legend. The '64XT is utterly convincing as a vintage classic despite the fact that it never existed before 2019. The package is completed by the bolt-on maple neck, pau ferro 'board with 21 medium frets, and a slippery graphite top nut.

Feel & Sounds

As you might expect, these Danelectros feel remarkably similar. The shallow D neck profile and flatter-than-Gibson-and-Fender 355mm (14-inch) 'board radius are more shred machine spec than vintage jalopy. That radius works great for beating out riffs and rapid surfy leads, but it might not suit those looking to dig in for upper-'board blues bends. Getting up there is a breeze, however. The skinny neck heel sees to that.

Classic-build Danelectros feel alive in your hands. Sustain is conspicuous and the



3. The 60th Anniversary '59M NOS+ comes spec'd with a Jimmy Page-style wrap-around bridge. That's the good news. We're not so keen on its body recess: it's an ugly solution to achieving a lower action. That said, the guitar plays and sounds great regardless of the aesthetic faux pas



4. Real Danos feature a body formed from a hardwood frame (usually pine) capped with an inexpensive sustainable engineered material called Masonite. Despite this low-cost construction, these guitars produce a great deal of acoustic volume and sustain. Plug into an amp and you'll discover a versatile tonal palette



5

5. When you buy an XT designation Dano you get a modern double Lipstick tube humbucker at the bridge and a big neck-position single coil. True guitar geeks will recognise that the latter unit looks like the pups fitted to 60s Mosrite guitars and the Dano '64 and '66 'tributes'

6. The '64XT's maple neck is bolted to the Masonite body, which features a hardwood skeleton just like the 3021 that came before it

635mm (25-inch) scale length ensures you get plenty of snap in the bottom strings. This guitar is spec'd with NOS+ single coils. We asked Danelectro to clarify: "The NOS+ is based on a pickup we designed in 1998 to 1999. Around 2009 or so we discovered a bunch of these pickups in a warehouse in Korea. We used them in our 59M NOS model. They were so popular, we soon ran out of these old pickups. We then engineered a new pickup close to the NOS ones, and named it the NOS+."

However the pie was made, these pickups taste like classic Danelectro to us. The Shorthorn has always been a tonal chameleon. The bridge pickup will jangle like a Rickenbacker *and* punch through a mix, Telecaster-style. Set both pickups in motion and you get the legendary fat Dano in-series tone that works so well for clean rhythm work. It'll handle jazz stuff, but the neck-position pup barks beautifully when you dial in some fuzz. If you like your blues on the trashier side, you need to try this click on the toggle switch.

Thanks to Mr Page we all know that a Dano can handle classic rock stuff. While the '59M NOS+ doesn't disappoint, some may prefer the slightly heavier delivery of the twin Lipstick bridge pickup on the '64XT. Here, you get the best of both worlds thanks to a push/pull coil-split function. The full throttle mode isn't going to turn the heads of many metal guitarists, but there's enough boost on offer to kick your dirty



6



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channel up a notch. Also notable is the fat tone of the neck single coil. Sonically, you're in a sweet spot between the girth of a classic P-90 and the bright openness of a Fender Jazzmaster neck pickup.

Verdict

Some vintage reissues give you sleepless nights. Online forums are riddled with distraught punters who loved their Les Pauls until someone hinted their pride and joy might be, gasp, weight relieved. Maybe the plastic bits are made from the wrong type of plastic. Worse than that, the thing isn't held together with hide glue after all.

The 60th Anniversary '59M NOS+ and '64XT are the antidote to all that malarkey. Yes, we'd prefer it if the '59M didn't have that dirty great big recess for the bridge, and we'd love to see a hardtail version of the '64XT. That's just typical guitar geek nitpicking. All said and done, these are fantastic and incredibly affordable instruments that come with oodles of vintage mojo and tone. And while Joe Bonamassa might not be stockpiling Danos for a rainy day, the 60th Anniversary '59M NOS+ and '64XT have what it takes to hang with the big boys. **G**

7. The iconic 'Coke bottle' headstock appears on both models here, as seen on Jimmy Page's iconic black Shorthorn



DANELECTRO 60TH ANNIVERSARY '59M NOS+

PRICE: £549
ORIGIN: Korea
TYPE: Twin-cutaway 'shorthorn' chambered electric guitar
BODY: Masonite with hardwood frame
NECK: Maple, bolt-on
SCALE LENGTH: 635mm (25")
NUT/WIDTH: Aluminium/42mm
FINGERBOARD: Pau ferro, 355mm (14") radius
FRETS: 21, medium
HARDWARE: Chrome recessed 6-saddle hardtail bridge and vintage-style tuners
BRIDGE/SPACING: 52mm
ELECTRICS: 2x NOS+ Lipstick single-coil pickups, 2x concentric volume and tone controls and 3-way pickup selector toggle switch
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 2.7/6
OPTIONS: None
RANGE OPTIONS: Standard '59 featuring the classic wood saddle bridge (£449); '59X 12-string from £579; '59M NOS (£499); '59 12-string (£529); '59 12-string with f-hole from £579; Vintage '56 Baritone (£579)
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISH: Deep Blue Metalflake (as reviewed), Silver Metalflake

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8/10

PROS It's your classic Dano: it rocks, it jangles, and it punches way above its price tag

CONS That bridge sinkhole hurts our eyeballs



DANELECTRO '64XT

PRICE: £699
ORIGIN: Korea
TYPE: Reverse double-cutaway chambered electric guitar
BODY: Masonite with hardwood frame
NECK: Maple, bolt-on
SCALE LENGTH: 635mm (25")
NUT/WIDTH: Graphite/43mm
FINGERBOARD: Pau ferro, 355mm (14") radius
FRETS: 21, medium
HARDWARE: Nickel Wilkinson WVS50 IIK vibrato and vintage-style tuners
BRIDGE/SPACING: 52mm
ELECTRICS: 1x Dual Lipstick humbucker (bridge), 1x P-90-style single coil (neck), master volume and master tone with push/pull coil-split and 3-way pickup selector toggle switch
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.2/7.4
OPTIONS: None
RANGE OPTIONS: '66 hardtail with f-hole in 3-Tone Sunburst, Gloss Black and Trans Red (£999)
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISH: 3-Tone Sunburst (as reviewed), Gloss Black, Vintage Cream



9/10

PROS A classic in the making; killer feel and tone; butter-wouldn't-melt looks; the vibrato adds versatility

CONS When you've got a minute, sort us out a hardtail option