

FEATURES

ON THE COVER

Whoa Canada!

Attendees were upbeat during MIAC, which took place in Toronto in October. Is the Canadian MI retailer different than the U.S. one?

ON THE COVER

The Survey Says...

Reader surveys always reveal a lot of information. This year is no different. Find out what you said about several topics, including how your holiday sales are expected to stock up this year.

ON THE COVER

Percussion Pointers

We serve up some tips about how you can help band directors select the right percussion products for their schools.

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THE BIRTH OF NORMANDY GUITARS

By Brian Berk

Let's face it: If you're going to be a new player in the ultra competitive guitar manufacturing market, you'd better be different. Jim Normandy, founder and CEO of Normandy Guitars, believes he has that unique product end users will covet.

There's no question Normandy Guitars are different. The guitars are the first to feature lightweight aluminum archtops. Salem, Ore.-based Normandy debuted the product at Summer NAMM a few months ago. The launch came just one month after Jim Normandy obtained a U.S. patent on his product.

"I made the first prototypes for these guitars 15 years ago," said Normandy. "I started making bass guitars because I'm a bass player. I got into bass because I saw all of those *Unplugged* shows MTV had in the early '90s. Those guitars you saw on the show were about \$3,000 at the time. I was going to grad school and couldn't afford one. So I thought about making my own guitar out of wood, fiberglass, plastic, and aluminum. I had a buddy who had an aluminum shop, [making it easier to make a guitar out of that element], and started making prototype after prototype. My friends really liked the sound and I thought I might have something. I kind of fell into the job."

Normandy later switched to making six-string electric guitars because he saw a much bigger market to sell into than basses. The electric is what was launched at Summer NAMM. But Normandy has big plans as well. He is debuting a bass that matches the archtop. "I'm also working on a Flying V that will be out at the Winter NAMM show," said Normandy. "We'll also be releasing a 'top-secret' model called the AlumiRay. It has a retro '50s look to it. It's going to be insane!"

Normandy Guitars feature .080 aircraft grade aluminum. In fact, Normandy receives its aluminum by way of an "aircraft code." Therefore, Normandy not only gets the same aluminum you see on planes, but in the same distribution method as the airlines as well.

But how heavy are the guitars? And how do they sound? "Everybody who has never heard the guitar before has a preconceived notion because it's metal," said Normandy. "Many people think aluminum might sound tinny or weird. But it doesn't. In fact, the normal music listener won't notice the difference at all. As for a guitar player, let me tell you some of the comments I receive: some have said it has its own mojo. It has its own vibe. They say, 'There's something about the aluminum I can hear, but it's good. It's warm sounding. It's not tinny. It has excellent sustain qualities. The length a single note can stand out is much longer than that of a standard guitar.' That's a big bonus for guitar players. Especially lead guitarists.

"In terms of the weight," he continued, "A classic Les Paul from the '50s or '60s is about 11 pounds. Our guitars weigh eight and a-half pounds. The weight is just the

right balance on a strap. A guitar can't be too light because it would tip from the headstock and when you're playing, you'd have to hold it up with your left hand."

Dealing With Dealers

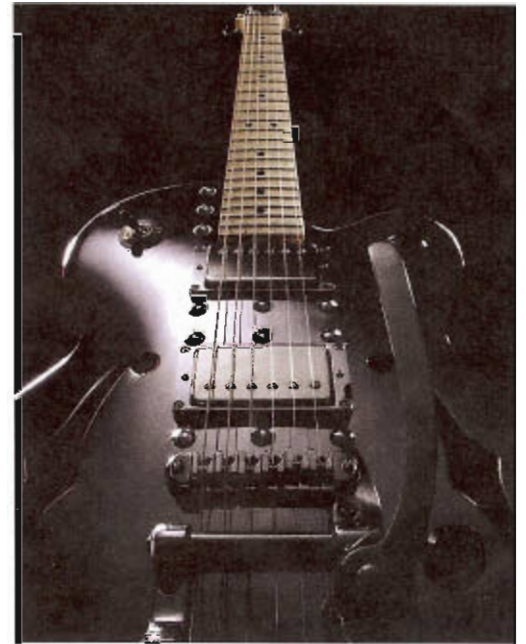
So you're sick of expensive dealer buy-ins or you don't make enough margins on the guitars you sell. What will Jim Normandy do for you?

"I'm trying to visit all of the West Coast stores personally, so I can meet the owners and managers," said Normandy, who was in Sacramento on such a trip when we spoke. "They're curious about the product. I want to tell them what it's about, why I did it, and what's great about it.

"I'm a small company," he added. "I'm not a huge conglomerate. Customer service is everything to me. I know I have a great product, but it means nothing if I can't stand behind it. I have a limited lifetime warranty on the guitar that goes far beyond those of many competitors. Also, every guitar comes with a custom hard shell road case that TKL custom makes for us. I think it's baloney that someone buys a guitar and pays extra for the case. Also, in terms of pricing, dealers don't have to make a massive commitment. I have "A" and "B" pricing. My MSRP on the guitars is \$2,599 and the MAP is \$1,999. If a dealer orders just one guitar, it's considered "C" pricing, which is 65 percent of the MSRP. "B" pricing is 60 percent of the MSRP and "A" pricing is 55 percent. All dealers have to do to get "A" pricing is either purchase between five and 10 guitars for the previous period, or commit to purchase five to 10. Other companies make dealers commit to much more than that. In the previous 12 months, if a dealer has sold 10 of our guitars, we give them "A" pricing for future orders.

Another advantage of producing aluminum guitars is environmental friendliness. If you drag a recycle bin down to your curb every week, aluminum is probably in the bin, especially if you like soda or beer cans. "I started out to just make a really cool guitar," said Normandy. "But it's a really nice bonus. As a manufacturer it's really important to be a good steward to the Earth. Most of the aluminum we use is recycled. Also, we use hard rock

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BIRTH OF A PRODUCT

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maple for our necks, which is a source of wood that is renewable.”

Normandy stressed he wants to have a boutique mentality, but doesn't want to be a boutique guitar company. “I want to be one of the big players,” he said. “The mom-and-pop owners who own one or two stores are incredibly important to me. I want to have a great working relationship with them. I want them to carry Normandy Guitars.”

Normandy Guitars are available in nine colors and three different finishes. The company is looking for plenty of dealers such as yourself. Check out www.normandyguitars.com for more information. 



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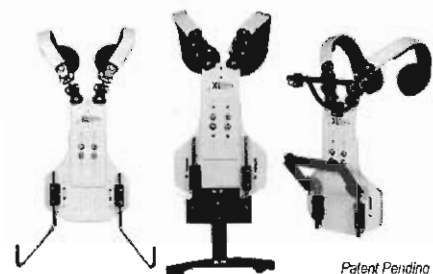
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