

ORTEGA D-WALKER and D3C-5

An acoustic bass that punches above its weight, and its much bigger brother: Joel McIver takes on the Ortega clan

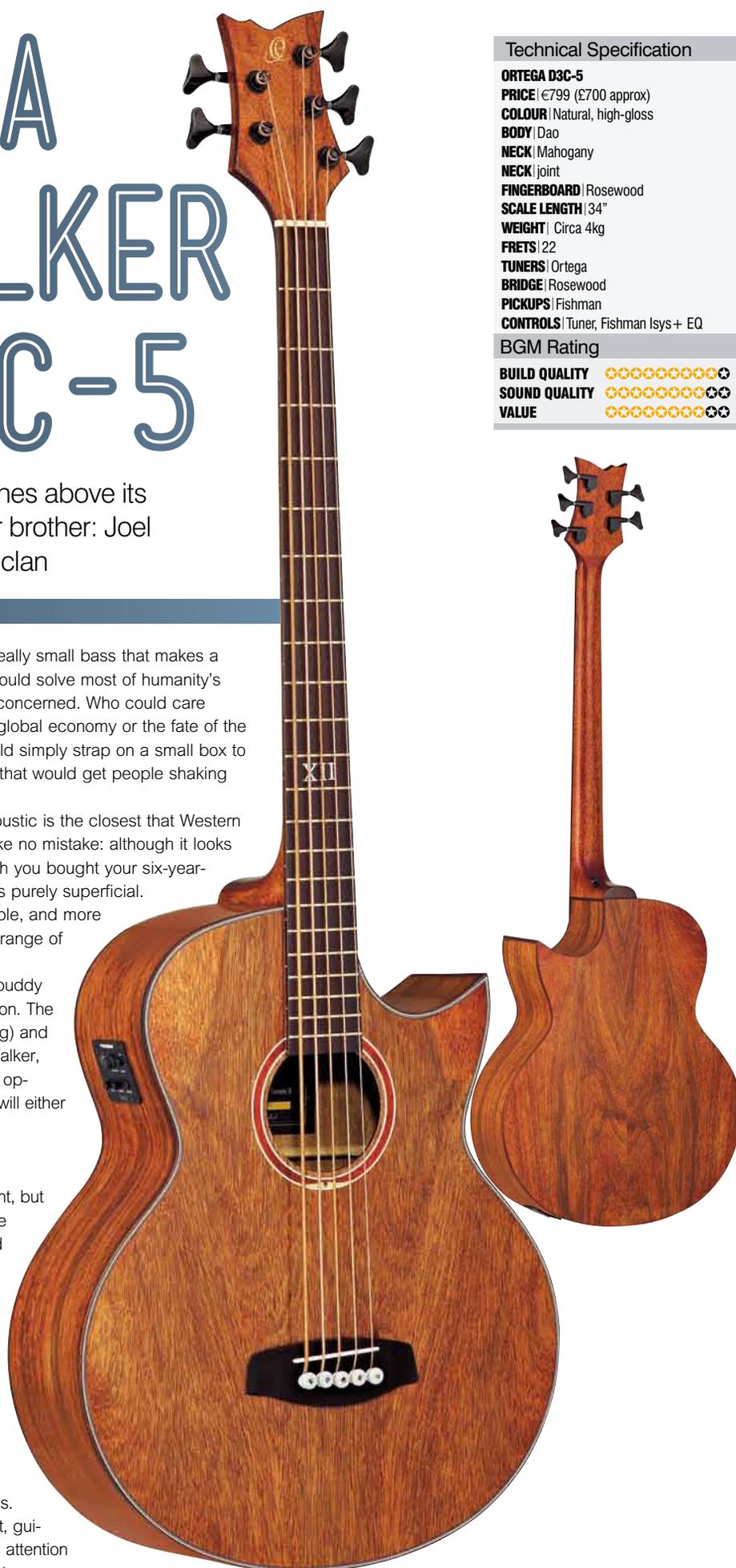
What the world needs is a really small bass that makes a really huge sound. That would solve most of humanity's problems as far as we're concerned. Who could care about the collapse of the global economy or the fate of the bumblebee when you could simply strap on a small box to your chest and blast out a sub-bass part that would get people shaking their booty within a 100-mile radius?

Well, Ortega's frankly tiny D-Walker acoustic is the closest that Western technology has come to such a goal. Make no mistake: although it looks and weighs like the £25 starter bass which you bought your six-year-old kid last Christmas, any resemblance is purely superficial. What we have here is an eminently playable, and more importantly usable, bass guitar with a full range of tones and bags of versatility.

Next to the D-Walker is its much larger buddy the D3C-5, a completely different proposition. The size of a wardrobe (OK, we're exaggerating) and made for a rather different user to the D-Walker, this is a chunk of bass that looks the polar opposite of its white chum in every way. But will either of them meet our significant expectations?

BUILD QUALITY

The D-Walker may look like a fun instrument, but that price tag of around 400 quid is no joke when the bass it pays for is this small. And make no mistake, this really is a teensy instrument, with a scale length barely over 24 inches, which means that it needs to provide serious quality to justify its price. Fortunately, we were unable to find anything to complain about when it came to its construction. When you pick up a bass this small, your brain is pre-programmed to shout 'Novelty instrument!' and as such you're almost certain to find something that doesn't feel like a 'real' bass. Instead, we have a solid, if very lightweight, guitar that has been constructed with obvious attention to detail from the fret ends to the neck finish.



Technical Specification

ORTEGA D3C-5
PRICE | €799 (£700 approx)
COLOUR | Natural, high-gloss
BODY | Dao
NECK | Mahogany
NECK | joint
FINGERBOARD | Rosewood
SCALE LENGTH | 34"
WEIGHT | Circa 4kg
FRETS | 22
TUNERS | Ortega
BRIDGE | Rosewood
PICKUPS | Fishman
CONTROLS | Tuner, Fishman Isys+ EQ

BGM Rating

BUILD QUALITY ★★★★★★☆☆
SOUND QUALITY ★★★★★★☆☆
VALUE ★★★★★★☆☆

Technical Specification

ORTEGA D-WALKER
PRICE | €455 (£400 approx)
COLOUR | White, high-gloss
BODY | Agathis
NECK | Mahogany
NECK JOINT |
FINGERBOARD | Rosewood
SCALE LENGTH | 24.4"
WEIGHT | Circa 3kg
FRETS | 20
TUNERS | Ortega
BRIDGE | Rosewood
PICKUPS | B.Bend A1.2 system
CONTROLS | None

BGM Rating

BUILD QUALITY ★★★★★★★★
SOUND QUALITY ★★★★★★★★
VALUE ★★★★★★★★



What We Think

PLUS | D-Walker is fun from start to finish, D3C-5 a much more serious instrument

MINUS | Tone range is limited on D-Walker, body size and depth of D3C-5 might be off putting

OVERALL | Giving low- to mid-budget acoustic basses a touch of real class

Contact Details

Ortega
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With that said, the D3C-5 is a far superior instrument in build. Of course it's significantly more expensive, but there is a feeling of quality to almost every aspect of the bass that can't be denied. The dao wood used for the body is silky to the touch, resonant to the slightest vibration of a string and millimetrically engineered all round. We tried our hardest, but there's really very little of note to complain about.

SOUNDS AND PLAYABILITY

The D-Walker knocks every single prejudice you ever had about travel/short-scale instruments into the proverbial cocked hat. The action on our review model was set perfectly, allowing you mid- to high-register runs with an ease that is genuinely rare on an acous-

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tic bass of any size. The neck finish is smooth and the small size of the body and neck unavoidably charming: you'll find yourself grinning as soon as you pick it up. If you're expecting serious bass frequencies, of course, forget it: this little bass simply doesn't have the necessary size or string length, so if you're after stomach-churning low end, expect to invest in some serious amplification. If you're soloing, though, or playing in an acoustic act, consider it.

None of this applies to the D3C-5, in many ways the polar opposite of its sibling. Its tonal range is fantastic, going all the way down to the sub-levels and back up again to the familiar acoustic squeak. Touches like the on-board tuner and as-standard straplocks were welcome, but essentially where this bass stands out is in its spectrum of sounds. In a sense, these tones come at a price: at 126mm, the depth of the body will be a real surprise for anyone not used to the acoustic bass, with a revised playing posture needed to get it completely right. Make that change, though, and you're in for one of the better acoustic experiences we've had in some time.

CONCLUSION

Acoustic bass players have plenty of choice nowadays when it comes to bass guitars: the pages of this magazine testify to that. As with electric basses, whether the Ortegas are right for you is largely down to individual feel, and in almost no other example is feel more relevant than here. The D-Walker is tiny, a fact which some players will love and others detest: its lack of a real bottom end may deter you, or it may not. Conversely, the tonal range of the D3C-5 is close to the state of the art when it comes to acoustic instruments, but its hefty body almost certainly will not be for everyone. Try before we buy, we say, but if you buy, you're unlikely to regret it. ■