

MONO TONE

ONE OF THE STARS OF THE LONDON GUITAR SHOW 2007 IS FINALLY READY!
DAVID GREEVES BRINGS YOU THE EXCLUSIVE FIRST REVIEW OF THE ORGANIC MONO

GBINFO



ORGANIC GUITARS MONO

PRICE: £1,999

BUILT IN: UK

SCALE LENGTH: 635mm (25 inches)

NUT WIDTH: 42mm (1.65 inches)

STRING SPACING AT NUT: 36mm (1.4 inches)

BODY: African padauk

NECK: African padauk, set

FINGERBOARD: Gabon ebony, 406mm radius (16 inches)

FRETS: 22 medium

PICKUPS: 2 x Bareknuckle Pickups BKP-92

CONTROLS: 2 x volume, 2 x tone

BRIDGE: Wilkinson/Gotoh wrap-over, black

STRING SPACING AT BRIDGE: 52mm (2 inches)

MACHINEHEADS: Gotoh Delta 510, black

WEIGHT: 3.6kg (7.9lbs)

FINISHES: Natural (shown), black; oil/wax finish

CASE: Hard case included

LEFT-HANDERS: Yes, no extra charge

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Launched in 2004, Organic Guitars has established a strong presence in the UK custom guitar market thanks to striking looks, high build quality and a great selling point – wood, wood and more wood! With their unusual tonewoods, meticulously shaped into smooth and – there's no other word for it – organic curves, these guitars feel like they've grown straight out of the ground.

The new Mono sees Organic marry this individual approach to guitar design with a more traditional blueprint to create something completely new. The Mono first appeared at the London Guitar Show earlier this year, where the prototype created quite a buzz – word of mouth ensured that the Organic Guitars stand was besieged for three days straight. Since then, it's been an agonising wait while the perfectionists at Organic chiselled and tweaked the final design, so we're thrilled to have got our hands on the very first production model. So what's it to be – a chip off the old block, or dead wood?

BODY & NECK

Looking at the Mono's single-cutaway body, wraparound bridge and twin P-90 pickups, the Gibson Les Paul Special (the two-pickup successor to

the Les Paul Junior) is clearly a big influence on the design, yet this guitar most definitely feels like an Organic instrument. One of the most interesting features of the company's guitars is that they are extensively shaped by hand so that there isn't a flat surface anywhere – even the back of the guitar is slightly concave. Organic's head honcho Duncan Wales talks about the "sucked sweet" quality of his guitars, as if a larger, squarer guitar has been worn down all over into a smoothly rounded form.

This symphony of smooth curves is lovely to look at (especially where the grain of the wood curls around the edges of the guitar) but it's even better to hold. The body feels comfortable and nicely compact – certainly smaller than that of a Les Paul – but there's a reassuring weight to it, and the Mono is perfectly balanced on the strap.

The body and neck are made from African padauk (pronounced, and sometimes spelled, 'padouk'). It's a tough, stable tonewood with a reddish-orange tinge. It's bright red when freshly cut, but over time will fade to a warm brown colour. It's not unlike rosewood in appearance, and does share some physical properties with this more traditional material. Organic suggests that its tone is closer to that of maple – hard and bright, with plenty of sustain.

The guitar is finished with a combination of oil and wax. This seals the wood but is practically no hindrance to body resonance, unlike thick polyester finishes. In fact, padauk is such an oily, resinous wood in its natural state that it requires little in the way of finishing.

The Mono's neck-body joint features a long tenon, meaning that the end of the neck extends far into the body – as far as the neck pickup cavity in this case. This type of joint is revered by Les Paul Junior cognoscenti as the best for tone and sustain, not to mention neck stability. Organic takes it a couple of steps further, however, as Duncan Wales explains in our interview on page 44. Firstly, the end of the neck is cut at an angle to create a larger surface area for wood-on-wood contact. Also, no glue is placed on front of the neck tenon (the surface that's facing you as you look down to the headstock from the bridge) so that there's no barrier to vibrations travelling up and down the grain of the body and neck.

The neck joint feels very sturdy indeed, and the neck pocket looks 



CARE AND FEEDING

HOW TO KEEP THE MONO CLEAN

■ The Mono's super-thin oil and wax finish is good news for resonance, sustain and tone, but you need to treat it a bit differently to your average axe.

While guitars finished with a polyurethane or polyester lacquer can more or less be wiped clean, maintaining the finish on an oiled guitar involves cleaning it and re-applying a new coat of wax at regular intervals. Grime will build up on the body and the back of the neck, and Organic recommends rubbing lightly with some fine synthetic steel wool to lift of the dirt. You then simply apply a thin coat (or several) of silicone-free



beeswax-based furniture wax (or a fancy branded guitar wax if you want to be flash) and buff till shiny. If the wood is looking a bit dry, you can rub in a little finishing oil before waxing, but with a resinous wood like padauk, this seems unlikely.



■ The pickups and bridge are recessed into the top, so the strings hover just above the body

■ We love the Mono's magnetic trussrod cover



extremely snug. At the rear, the heel is carved right back, and the line of the neck-body join is set at an angle, sloping down from the 15th fret on the bass side to the 19th fret on the treble side. This yields excellent access to the upper frets.

Around the first few frets the neck profile is very slim and fairly flat. Moving up the neck, the profile becomes deeper and more rounded. This is not an exaggerated change – even at its fullest, the neck is still a manageable rounded C shape – but it provides great support to the left hand. In fact, it feels so good to play that you really don't notice the changing profile. Of all the features of this guitar, this is probably the one that gives the strongest sense of someone having spent a long time carefully working on this wood by hand to get the shape just right.

The smooth, hard ebony fingerboard has a flat 406mm radius (16 inches), and the action on the review sample had been set very low when it arrived. Preferring a slightly higher action, we were soon adjusting the bridge to raise it up a little, but the fact that the guitar is completely playable with the strings hovering just

above the frets demonstrates the precision with which the frets have been profiled and finished. It's a top-class bit of work.

HARDWARE & PARTS

The Mono's Wilkinson/Gotoh wrap-over bridge is recessed into the body and has two moveable sections (one under the A and D strings, the other under the G and B) allowing for a degree of intonation adjustment. The strings aren't anchored in the bridge as you might expect – after wrapping over the back of the bridge, the strings go straight down through the body where the ball ends are held in six recessed holes. It's an unusual approach, but you can see the logic – the Mono is aiming to harness the sustain-enhancing properties of through-body stringing while keeping the traditional appearance of a wrap-over bridge.

The latter is, of course, a key element of the Les Paul Junior look, as are a pair of P-90-style pickups. These 'soapbar' single-coils are made by Bare Knuckle Pickups, another British company that has carved out a niche for itself in a competitive marketplace thanks to the strength of its product. These pickups are BKP-92's, Bareknuckle's hottest P-90, featuring alnico-V magnets and extra windings of specially enamelled wire for more output. Since each Organic guitar is effectively

custom-made, you can have whatever pickups you want, whether that's a set of more vintage low-output P-90s, humbuckers, Fender-style single-coils or something else. The pickups are wired to individual volume and tone controls and a three-way selector switch on the bass side of the upper bout, though, again, you can specify your own favoured control layout. At the rear, the control cavities have padauk covers that appear to have been cut from the body itself, so the grain of the cover matches that of the body. We're not sure how Organic manages to remove these bits of wood on the way to routing the cavity, but it's certainly impressive.

The pickups and the bridge are recessed into the body, so the strings sit very close to the top of the guitar. Strat and Tele players probably won't notice, but Les Paul players used to a good bit of clearance underneath the strings may find their pick hitting the top of the guitar or the edges of the pickups at first. The body is protected by an elegantly shaped pickguard that's made out of ebony rather than plastic. Duncan Wales told us that he was so keen to avoid putting any plastic on the guitar that he even considered making the pickup covers out of ebony, but found that they'd have to be so thin that they would inevitably crack. The pickguard is quite thick, meaning that the top E string sits just a few millimetres above it, but we soon adjusted to this.

The headstock is home to a set of Gotoh Delta 510 machineheads, finished in black, like the rest of the hardware. They have a very high 21:1 ratio, allowing extremely precise tuning. A well-cut Graph Tech nut ensures that the strings don't stick



GBOPINION

ORGANIC GUITARS MONO

GOLD STARS

- ★ Familiar yet original styling
- ★ Excellent build quality
- ★ Brilliant playable neck

BLACK MARKS

- None

IDEAL FOR...

Anyone looking for a high-quality traditional rock guitar with a unique woody twist

DETAILS

A FANTASTIC ROCK GUITAR THAT ALSO HAPPENS TO BE A WORK OF ART



■ The control-cavity covers match the grain of the body perfectly – another Organic touch



■ Despite appearances, the strings go through the body to maximise sustain



■ Gotoh Delta 510 21:1-ratio machineheads allow wonderfully precise tuning control



■ The Mono comes with straplocks fitted as standard

in their slots. The wooden trussrod cover, which bears the Organic logo, is cleverly held in place by a small magnet, meaning it can simply be popped off to access the trussrod. Finally, the guitar comes fitted with a set of straplocks.

SOUNDS

Strummed acoustically, the Mono is not as loud as we were expecting, but it has a strong, articulate tone with very good sustain – you can really feel the body resonating against your chest.

We plugged the Mono into a variety of amps, from small valve combos to a boutique 50-watt head, and it performed brilliantly through every single one. The Bareknuckle pickups are punchy and assertive, giving the Mono a tight and controlled sound. There's more detail and definition to the notes than you get from some P-90-equipped guitars – undoubtedly down to a combination of the dense, hard body and the high-output pickups – but the guitar can sound a little cold and precise through a clean amp, especially on the bridge pickup. We suspect that some lower-output P-90s would sound a bit warmer and more rounded.

The Mono takes to overdrive like a duck to the wet stuff, however, and those same tonal characteristics mean that you can pile on masses of gain without losing note definition. The bridge pickup provides some classic raw rock sounds, with lashings of punky energy and attitude. Power chords sound huge and detailed, while lead lines are clear and incisive. The neck pickup provides a broader tone, though there's still plenty of top end to stop the sound getting muddy.

Our overall impression is of a guitar that's a joy to play. With its compact, rounded body, wonderful neck profile and impeccably finished frets, it's an absolute pleasure to thrash out chords in the lower register, zip up and down the neck, or simply make use of the instrument's strong resonance for sweet, sustaining single notes.

GBCONCLUSION

WOOD, WOOD, GLORIOUS WOOD

■ **It's been an agonising six-month wait to get our hands on this guitar, but after such a build up, surely the Organic Mono can't live up to expectations? Of course it can – the Mono is everything we were hoping for, and more.**

It's a beautiful hand-made guitar that really feels like a great deal of care and attention has gone into its construction – we'd expect nothing less from Organic. But it also skilfully mixes the company's own ideas on design with a more classic, vintage look, which should greatly broaden the guitar's appeal. The price puts it into the 'serious money, serious guitar' bracket, but then the Mono is made by hand, by a small and dedicated team here in the UK. The sounds on offer tend towards the rock, punk and blues palette, but the Mono's generous sustain and excellent definition mean it's capable of a lot more. And with high overall build quality and a wonderfully playable neck, the Mono is every inch an excellent instrument. **GB**

GBRATINGS

ORGANIC GUITARS MONO	
BODY & NECK	★★★★
HARDWARE & PARTS	★★★★
PLAYABILITY	★★★★
SOUNDS	★★★★
VALUE FOR MONEY	★★★
GBVERDICT	★★★★