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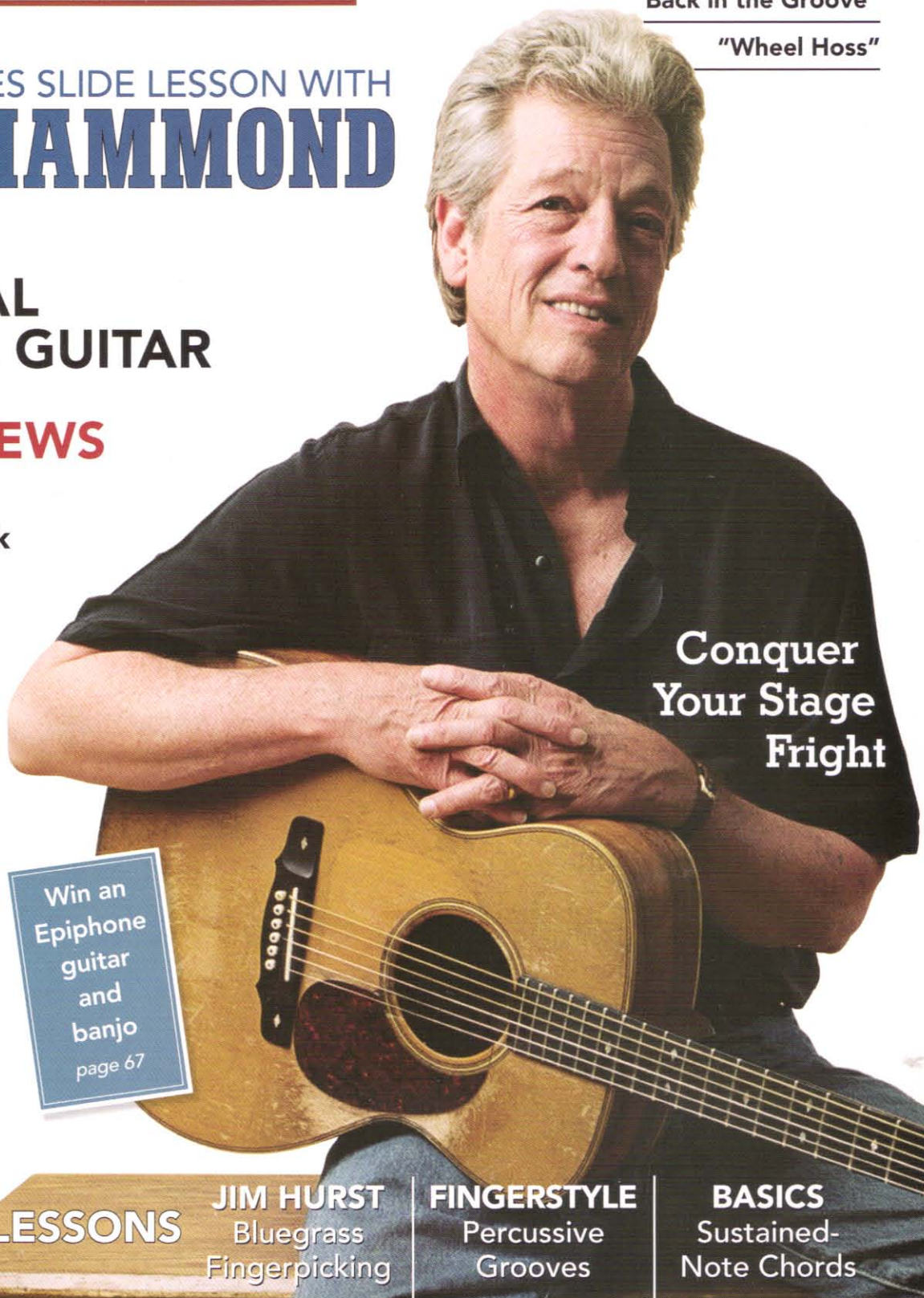
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# Durango B-46 Slope-shoulder Dreadnought

An unbelievably great-sounding flattop with authentic vintage vibe and a price tag that'll make you flip.

by Teja Gerken



Saga Musical Instruments has an impressive track record of offering well-appointed tools for cash-strapped players. Though the company only sold banjo kits when it opened shop in 1973, Saga has grown to include such brands as Kentucky mandolins, Regal resonator guitars, Trinity College bouzoukis, Gitane Gypsy guitars, and Blueridge flattops—and each of these lines has found scores of fans. Most recently, Saga introduced the Durango brand, which features nine inexpensive guitars, including this top-of-the-line B-46 dreadnought, that appear to be inspired by the Gibson flattop tradition.

## VINTAGE STYLE AND PLAYABILITY

With its slope-shouldered body, sunburst finish, and long scale length, the B-46 is clearly modeled after Gibson's legendary Advanced Jumbo. In the same spirit, the guitar's neck has a relatively deep "D" profile, giving it more of a vintage feel than many contemporary guitars. But the B-46 is not a copy. Its dot fretboard inlays, more tapered bridge shape, herring-bone rosette, soundhole truss-rod access, and sycamore back and side laminates are all distinctive departures from Gibson's classic.

Our review guitar was constructed with obvious care, and the materials appear to offer a structurally solid foundation. The guitar has an aggressively scalloped X-bracing pattern and a

rosewood bridge plate. The bridge and saddle provided a proper break angle for the strings, leaving room for future action adjustments. The guitar's fretwork was very clean and nicely polished but, while perfectly functional, the nut was about  $\frac{1}{32}$  of an inch too short at each side of the fingerboard. Players who mute their bass strings with the palm of their picking hand may also find the ends of the saddle to be a bit sharp.

## TONE TO RIVAL THE BIG BOYS

Any doubts I had about how well a guitar at this price could perform were dismissed with the very first strum. "Jaw-dropping" is the best way to sum up the guitar's performance. Its richness and complexity of tone are reminiscent of some instruments costing literally ten times as much, and I was surprised at the guitar's lively sustain and sparkling bass, both of which were more Martin-like than I expect from a round-shouldered dreadnought. The B-46's dynamic range

## At a Glance

### Durango B-46


HIGHLIGHTS	Amazingly mature, complex-sounding, and easy-playing guitar for very little money.
THE SPECS	Solid spruce top. Laminated sycamore back and sides. Rosewood fretboard and bridge. Mahogany neck. Scalloped X-bracing. Open-back tuners. Thin glossy urethane finish. 25.5-inch scale, $1\frac{3}{4}$ -inch nut. $2\frac{3}{8}$ -inch string spacing at saddle. Made in China.
WATCH FOR	Some tuning machines have stiff action.
THIS IS COOL	Tone and playability go way past entry-level price. A serious contender for being the ultimate inexpensive back-up guitar.
BEST FOR	Anyone looking for a great-sounding dreadnought on a severe budget.
PRICE	\$295 list/\$189.99 street.
MAKER	Saga Musical Instruments, (800) BUY-SAGA, <a href="http://www.sagamusic.com">www.sagamusic.com</a> .

makes it perfect for bluegrass-style G-runs, but it also handled strumming duties and even fingerstyle playing well. *Acoustic Guitar* associate editor Shawn Hammond concurs: "The B-46 sounds and plays flat-out awesome. I particularly dug playing it fingerstyle in D A D G A D; its enveloping warmth under a soft touch and its burnished, crisp tones under greater attack inspired a new tune within minutes." The guitar's volume will make it right at home in an acoustic jam—where it just might steal the show. I didn't find any problems or limitations with the guitar's playability, although a beginner may want to have the action lowered slightly.

Given the guitar's cost and its impressive sound, I couldn't help wondering if there was a catch. With that in mind, here are a few minor nagging points: The guitar's open-back tuners have great vintage vibe, but a couple of them (especially the fourth and fifth string) were slightly hard to turn, and their overall feel was inconsistent. Playing delicate fingerstyle material up the neck, I found that a few notes seemed slightly less resonant than others. And, personally, I wasn't wild about the guitar's supershiny, somewhat "plasticky" feeling finish. On the body, this was for purely cosmetic reasons, but on the guitar's neck, I just didn't care for the slick feel.

#### THE WRAP

The Durango B-46 is a guitar that, from a purely utilitarian perspective, made me question why I own expensive high-end instruments. The guitar's complex tone and healthy volume prove that laminated back and sides can sound great, and its "out-of-the-box" playability was on par with most of today's acoustics. Saga may have come up with the ultimate back-up guitar for players who prefer to leave their pricey favorites at home. Likewise, the B-46 may convince intermediate players lusting for a new ax that a well-known name on the headstock and a big price tag aren't always prerequisites for great tone. Finally, beginners can be confident that they're getting an instrument that—G.A.S. notwithstanding—will allow them to grow and hold their own in any musical situation.

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