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# GEAR Bench Test



SPECS | **Blueridge**, dist by Saga Musical Instruments, (650) 588-5558; [sagamusic.com](http://sagamusic.com)

	Blueridge BG-40	Blueridge BG-160
<b>PRICE</b>	\$695 retail/\$519 street	\$1,049 retail/\$819 street
<b>NUT WIDTH</b>	1 <sup>11</sup> / <sub>16</sub> "	1 <sup>11</sup> / <sub>16</sub> "
<b>NECK</b>	"C" profile, three-piece mahogany	"C" profile, three-piece mahogany
<b>FRETBOARD</b>	24 <sup>3</sup> / <sub>4</sub> " scale rosewood	24 <sup>3</sup> / <sub>4</sub> " scale rosewood
<b>FRETS</b>	19 medium nickel silver (14 clear of the body)	19 medium nickel silver (14 clear of the body)
<b>BODY</b>	Laminated mahogany back and sides, solid Sitka spruce top	Solid rosewood back and sides, solid Sitka spruce top
<b>BRIDGE</b>	Rosewood with compensated saddle	Rosewood with compensated saddle
<b>HARDWARE</b>	Open-gear tuners	Gold-plated open-gear tuners
<b>FACTORY STRINGS</b>	D'Addario, .012-.053	D'Addario, .012-.053
<b>WEIGHT</b>	4.1 lbs	4.5 lbs
<b>KUDOS</b>	Solid craftsmanship. Great look. Quality sounds and playability.	Solid craftsmanship. Great look. Quality sounds and playability.
<b>CONCERNS</b>	Unbeveled pickguard cheapens the appearance of this otherwise impressive guitar.	None.



## Blueridge BG-40 and BG-160

TESTED BY ART THOMPSON

### HIGH-END ACOUSTIC GUITAR COMPANIES

such as Collings and Santa Cruz have mastered the art of creating superlative, traditional-style flat-top guitars. Their success in this arena has prompted the Blueridge company—an offshoot of South San Francisco-based Saga Musical Instruments—to introduce its own “traditional” series guitars that give players a taste of vintage-modern vibe at considerably more affordable prices.

The Blueridge BG-40 and BG-160 are Chinese-made instruments that are modeled on a National guitar that was made by Gibson in the 1950s. Both feature slope-shoulder dreadnought body styles (16" wide at the lower bout), classic inlay patterns, lovely two-tone sunburst finishes, and old-world construction details such as hand-carved parabolic X bracing (which is of the smaller, thinner type used on the National guitars) and

dovetail neck joints. Both models also use the same slim, "C"-shaped neck—which is easy to get your hand around, and imparts a faster feel than you might expect from a vintage-type guitar. Combined with the 24 $\frac{3}{4}$ " fretboard and fairly low action, the playability of these guitars is very sweet. The intonation on both guitars is happening, too. Comparing fretted notes and harmonics for each string at the 12th fret revealed no significant inconsistencies, and, more importantly, both sounded satisfyingly in tune up and down the neck. The open-gear tuners operate smoothly and keep the strings reliably in pitch, but they aren't quite as precise or as easy to turn as the more expensive Waverly open-gear machines found on many high-end guitars. Both Blueridge guitars feature headstock accessible trussrods, which are easier to adjust than the type that must be accessed through the soundhole.

The Blueridge factory apparently takes its product consistency very seriously, and this extends to the fretwork, finishes, and cosmetic details. Despite the \$300 price difference between the BG-40 and BG-160, both



The BG-160's headstock is adorned with pearl inlays and a cool looking abalone logo banner.

guitars feature nicely shaped (though not highly polished) frets, beautiful sunburst tops, neatly installed tinted binding on their bodies (three-ply on the top, single-ply on the back), and matching rosettes of three-ply binding material. Neither instrument has a back or end strip, but both offer pearl fretboard inlays (diamond and snowflakes on the BG-40, and floral-style motifs on the BG-160) that are neatly set into the wood with minimal evidence of filler. Both models also sport cream-colored heel caps, and vintage-looking "Blueridge" headstock logos that are written in script on stylish pearl banners. The pickguard on the costlier BG-160 has a yellow-and-brown pattern and beveled edges, and the 'guard on the BG-40 complements the dark tobacco-burst finish of the top and has unfinished edges. Inside the BG-40 and BG-160 is a similar level of quality, with smoothly sanded and tight-fitting braces, no excess glue where the braces contact the body, and no sawdust or wood debris floating around inside.

The biggest difference between these guitars is how they sound—which is to be

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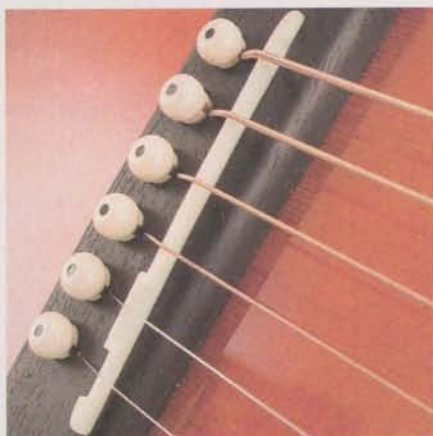


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expected, as the BG-160 has a solid rosewood back and sides, and the BG-40 uses laminated mahogany for these components. This results in the BG-160 delivering brighter, snappier highs and tighter lows. You get the punchy midrange associated with this body design—which is great for lead playing—and you can hammer down on chords without feeling that the top is compressing excessively, or in any way restraining the output. The 160's voice is not as full-bodied as that of a rosewood Martin D-28 we used as a reference (which also has a chunkier "V"-shaped neck), but there's nothing unsatisfying here. The BG-160's sound complements its traditional look, and what more could you ask for from a guitar in this price range?

The BG-40 isn't as loud or punchy as the BG-160, but it does offer a somewhat sweeter and more vocalized set of mids that makes it a lot of fun to play. The BG-40 is rounder overall, and though its lows sound a little more tubby than tight, you still get plenty of crispness and detail for fingerstyle playing. The BG-40 is better suited for a singer/songwriter than for someone who needs to cut through



A compensated saddle is used on both the BG-40 and the BG-160.

in an acoustic band, but this guitar doesn't lose its balance or focus when you dig in on it, either—it's just not as much of a sonic cannon as its more expensive sibling. The BG-40's mahogany construction isn't a recipe for a super-taut attack, but the mellow twang that this wood imparts on the tone takes things in a direction that has echoes of '30s-

era country blues and primordial jazz.

The BG-40 and BG-160 are distinctive instruments that go a long way toward bridging the coolness gap between high-end custom guitars and run-of-the-mill production models. Both deliver some of the essence of a classic vintage dreadnought, and they're also original-looking enough to give you the feeling of owning something Gibson or Martin *might* have made, but never did. There's a lot to like about these good-sounding guitars, and if you're shopping for something affordable with a vintage soul, you'll definitely want to investigate what the Blueridge line has to offer. **E**

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