

SUPER-SPECIAL BEATLES COLLECTOR'S ISSUE

GET ALL 4 COVERS & SONGS

GEORGE'S FAB FRIEND: GRETSCH TENNESSEAN

# Guitar Player



AUGUST 2004

FEED YOUR OBSESSION

## BEATLEMANIA! THE GUITAR STORY



**17 REVIEWS**  
NEW TOOLS FROM VOX, PRS, IBANEZ,  
TAYLOR, DAISY ROCK, AND MORE!

**PLAY!**  
"I FEEL FINE"

U.S. \$5.99 CAN. \$6.99



RD-52

- 2" nut width
- Square 25"-scale rosewood-on-mahogany neck
- Traditional 12-fret block-and-dowel neck joint
- Nickel open-gear tuners with scalloped buttons
- Laminated mahogany body with 1930s California-model dimensions
- Maple soundwell with trapezoid ports
- Quarterman 10<sup>9</sup>/sr<sup>2</sup> spun aluminum cone and cast aluminum spider bridge
- Fan-pattern coverplate with trapeze tailpiece
- Bone nut and maple saddle
- Mother-of-pearl and abalone headstock inlay
- Ivoroid headstock, fretboard, and body binding



## REGAL RD-52 BLACK LIGHTNING AND RC-1 POLYCHROME DUOLIAN

TESTED BY ANDY ELLIS

### INSTANT GRATIFICATION REGAL RD-52 BLACK LIGHTNING

#### WHO'S IT FOR?

Lap-style slide players wanting a hot-red resonator at a bargain price.

#### KUDOS

Quarterman cone yields throaty sound. Nice workmanship and hardware. Cool headstock inlay.

#### CONCERNS

Setup needs minor tweaking to level-out string height.

#### PRICE

\$695 retail  
\$549 street

#### CONTACT

Saga Musical Instruments,  
(850) 588-5558,  
sagamusical.com

#### EDITORS' PICK AWARD

Invented in the 1920s by the Dopyera brothers—Czechs who immigrated to the United States in 1908—the mechanically amplified resonator guitar has survived decades of shifting musical trends to become an iconic sound in American music. Three companies—Dobro, National, and Regal—produced most of the early resonator guitars. The history of these outfits is intertwined and convoluted, but here's what matters: The concept of adding an aluminum speaker cone to an acoustic to increase its volume and projection was embraced by two groups of musicians. First were the Delta bluesmen, who favored roundneck, metal-bodied guitars they held in the traditional "Spanish" playing position. Like Son House and Bukka White, these guitarists mixed bottleneck slide with fretted riffs. The second group comprised bluegrass musicians who followed the trailblazing Brother Oswald and Josh Graves—pickers who used horizontally held instruments with wood bodies and

square necks. On such acoustic steel guitars, the strings are jacked high off the neck, and players use a tone bar—never fingers—to create different pitches.

Saga Musical Instruments, who now owns the Regal brand, has for some years offered imported reso guitars in both styles. I tested one of each: the RD-52 Black Lightning, a sexy wooden squareneck, and the RC-1 Polychrome Duolian, a steel-bodied roundneck blues machine.

### RD-52 BLACK LIGHTNING

Named in honor of "1952 Vincent Black Lightning"—British folkie Richard Thompson's ballad of a red-haired girl, a motorcycle, and death by shotgun that Del McCoury turned into a recent bluegrass hit—the RD-52 perfectly bridges the gap between affordable but boring budget squarenecks, and luscious but pricey custom models. The RD-52's solid-mahogany



ZOOM



Made of abalone and mother-of-pearl, the RD-52's headstock inlay adds visual pizzazz.

#### INSTANT GRATIFICATION

REGAL RC-1  
POLYCHROME  
DUOLIAN

#### WHO'S IT FOR?

Slide players wanting an inexpensive steel-body blues machine.

#### KUDOS

Vintage 2-piece body construction. Cutting midrange tones.

#### CONCERNS

Rough fretboard binding. Tool marks on neck. Setup needs minor tweaking for proper string radius.

#### PRICE

\$495 retail  
\$379 street

#### CONTACT

Saga Musical  
Instruments,  
(650) 588-5558,  
sagamusical.com

neck joins the laminated-mahogany body at the 12th fret with a traditional block-and-dowel neck joint. Inside, a laminated-maple soundwell sports trapezoidal ports, just like the old days. Suspended above the soundwell are a 10 1/8" spun aluminum cone, and a cast aluminum spider bridge with a maple saddle. Made by John Quarterman from a special alloy, the cone is a big deal. Tim Scheerhorn and Paul Beard use Quartermans in their custom resos, and the RD-52 is the first under-\$1,000 production squareneck to feature one. Nickel-plated open-gear tuners, a chrome fan-pattern coverplate, and a chrome trapeze tailpiece round out the hardware.

Dragging out my guitar-geek toolkit, I determined the Black Lightning's critical measurements fall within vintage specs (which varied over the years). It has a 25" string scale and a burly 2" x 5/8" bone nut. Hovering 3/8" off the fretboard, the strings have a generous 2 3/8" spacing at the saddle—just right for those nickel fingerpicks—that narrows to 1 1/8" at the nut to facilitate fancy bar-and-open-string riffage. Patterned after 1930s resonator guitars built in California (as opposed to Chicago), the graceful, compact body measures 14 1/8" at the lower bout with a depth of 3 3/8".

Vintage Dobros sport a semi-matte, thin lacquer finish. By contrast, the RD-52's dark walnut stain is protected with a relatively thick, high-gloss polyester coat. Smooth and shiny, it promises to make the Black Lightning stand out onstage. The

large, well-rendered, crossed lightning-bolt headstock inlay is fetching. Designed by noted engraver Greg Rich and composed of abalone and mother-of-pearl, it's sure to turn heads.

The RD-52 sounds as cool as it looks. Thanks to the trick cone and solid setup, this guitar pumps out fat bass, throaty mids, and sweet, creamy highs. Sure, you'll get more presence and nuance from a \$3,000 boutique reso guitar, but the Black Lightning offers much of the magic for a fraction of the price. The frets are sweet (not that you'll ever touch 'em), the tuners are solid, the ivoroid body and neck binding is clean, and there's nary a rattle in the bowels of this beast.

Beefs? The unusually pliable screen mesh covering the dual soundports is prone to denting. I found a few chips on the neck heel finish that likely occurred in assembly. And—after lots of searching—I located a small cluster of dents in the back that dwell below the gloss coat. But hey, these are all cosmetic issues. My only real carp is that the strings aren't dead flat at the nut or saddle—a problem a good tech can resolve in about an hour. Sonically and visually, this is the best import reso I've ever played. If you're shopping for a production square-neck, start here.

#### RC-1 POLYCHROME DUOLIAN

With its glistening gunmetal gray finish and sieve-pattern chrome coverplate,

## RC-1

- 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ "-wide nut width
- Round 25"-scale rosewood-on-mahogany neck with trussrod
- Traditional extended neck tongue with soundpost
- Chrome die-cast sealed tuners
- 2-piece stamped-steel body with rolled f-holes
- 9 $\frac{1}{2}$ " spun aluminum cone and wooden biscuit bridge
- Sieve-pattern coverplate with trapeze tailpiece
- Plastic nut
- Pearloid headstock veneer
- Plastic fretboard binding

the metal-body RC-1 looks sharp from afar. But, as we'll see, closer inspection reveals some rough edges. Like the classic blues guitars of yesteryear, the RC-1 is assembled from two pieces of stamped steel. Its f-holes are nicely rolled in, and, except for one small lump, the enamel paint is evenly applied. The RC-1's back is slightly arched, but, otherwise, its body dimensions match those of the RD-52.

The 19-fret neck joins the body at the 14th fret and offers a trussrod—a real improvement over vintage steel-body axes. The fretwork is adequate, and the mother-of-pearl dot position markers are cleanly cut and inlaid. By contrast, the plastic fretboard binding shows shop dirt and tool marks. The pearloid headstock veneer is kitschy cool, but its heart-flower decal obviously ripped as it was being applied.

Our RC-1 came set up for bottleneck. You can easily finger notes up to the 4th fret, but, beyond that, the action gets quite

high (as much as  $\frac{3}{16}$ " in the upper positions). This is appropriate for playing energetic blues with a brass or heavy glass slide. The neck's slim profile encourages fast glissandos—nice—but lurking beneath the finish, numerous tool marks suggest a rushed assembly. Though the string height at the nut and saddle needs some work to create an even radius, the string spacing ( $2\frac{1}{8}$ " tapering to  $1\frac{3}{8}$ " at the nut) feels comfy for fingerpicking.

The RC-1's 9 $\frac{1}{2}$ " spiral-ribbed, spun aluminum cone provides a strong, barky midrange with pronounced octave overtones. The guitar is loud, but lacks a fat, growling bottom. Overall, the RC-1's voice is penetrating and aggressive. With a street price of well under \$400, the RC-1 delivers fair value, but don't expect it to seduce you with a bell-like chime. What it does offer is a coach-class ticket to the land of Delta blues—and that's a boon to cost-conscious players. **B**

**QUINETTE = HOT CLUB = GITANE**

DC-300, DC-250, DC-250R, DC-255, DC-300

**SAGA**  
the source.

Phone: (650) 588-5538 • Fax: (650) 871-7590  
www.sagaguitars.com  
DEALER INQUIRIES INVITED!

*"I've lived this music for so long and to get all of my favorite features on one guitar is so great."*  
John Jorgensen, *Rolling Stone* Fall 2004

SAGA has added the Grandest Gitane and only signature model guitar to date...the DC-300. Models John Jorgensen! Features include: hand-selected solid spruce used for the top and back-matched, Brazilian Rosewood used for the back and sides, a custom designed mahogany neck with ebony fingerboard, tortoise style body binding, and sound hole rosette and tailpiece insert.

**Regal**  
**Lightning Follows Thunder!**  
The New Regal Black Lightning...RD-52!

**H**ere's a new Regal Dobro with the power and drive to cut through the traffic! If you're being held back by a machine that isn't performing, stop by your local shop and test drive a Regal Black Lightning...RD-52...and hear the thunder!

- Quarterman resonator cone
- 1930's Vintage California body shape
- Traditional Block & Stinger neck/body join
- Rock Maple, trapezoid relieved soundwell

**SAGA**  
the source.

Phone: (650) 588-5538 • Fax: (650) 871-7590  
www.sagaguitars.com  
DEALER INQUIRIES INVITED!