

PRICE:  
FRESHMAN  
APOLLO 4 OC  
£699.95



## FRESHMAN APOLLO 4 OC

Sam Wise investigates yet another acoustic guitar form Freshman that aims to push the boundaries of what we can expect for our money...

Headquartered in Scotland but manufactured in China, Freshman has built an impressive reputation for building instruments that sound better than their price tag suggests. The Apollo 4 is not only the top of the Apollo range of electro-acoustics, launched two years ago, but also represents Freshman's cheapest all-solid guitar to be equipped with a pickup.

### Body and Neck

The 4 OC is a broadly OM-sized cutaway guitar, and a rather sumptuous-looking one at that. The spruce soundboard is not quite out of the top drawer, the grain being rather uneven – fine in some places and very broad in others, Freshman claim it to be AAA grade, but that seems doubtful. The mahogany back and sides, however, are appealingly striped, with narrower striping on the back than on the sides, and are stained to a rich toffee colour. Indeed, the guitar is a bit of a mahogany playground, with a mahogany neck and mahogany binding to both body and fingerboard. This lends the guitar a

distinctive warmth to its look, and you gain the impression that perhaps the spruce is stained a little darker than usual to complement it. The bindings are separated from the rest of the body with a tiny coach line of maple, and a similar treatment has been applied to the neck. This is topped with a rosewood fingerboard with

**The build quality is excellent, with literally nothing to criticise about the construction**



The rosewood bridge is conventional in design but well constructed

wooden dot markers, adding to the extremely woody feel of the guitar overall. The very conventional rosewood bridge has a bone saddle, and black wooden bridge pins with abalone inlays, which look very classy. There's a bone nut, and the headstock is faced with rosewood, bound once more with mahogany and maple. The unbranded closed-back tuners are gold anodised, and the fact that the black plastic buttons come as a disappointment is testimony that the rest of the guitar has raised our expectations well above what's reasonable at the price point.

The quality of the build is excellent, there being literally nothing to criticise about the construction. The jointing is neat, the binding is even and the frets are well dressed. The 4 OC is equipped with Fishman's Presys Blend pickup system, which is

impressively featured for an entry-level rig. It's based around a combination of undersaddle piezo and built-in mic, allowing you to mix the two to give more of the natural sound of the guitar's top, or more of the punchy piezo tone. The comprehensive head unit includes a three-band EQ, chromatic tuner, notch filter and phase shift button, which is a great deal on a system which can be bought for less than £50! The Apollo is a fundamentally conventional-looking guitar from a distance, and might not leap out from a wall of competitors, but looked at close up it has an air of luxury which is very appealing.

### Sounds

OMs represent a nice size compromise, but thanks to the shape and depth of the waist offer much easier accessibility than a dreadnought or jumbo, and the Apollo is no exception. The neck is a slightly chunkier than usual C- or oval shape, which we find a pleasing change. Those who like their necks superslim and slick might not agree, but we'd encourage you to try it.

The tone is absolutely classic spruce and mahogany: light, bright and airy at the top end, but with a pleasing underlying warmth and complexity. The Apollo is a



### The Guitar Tech

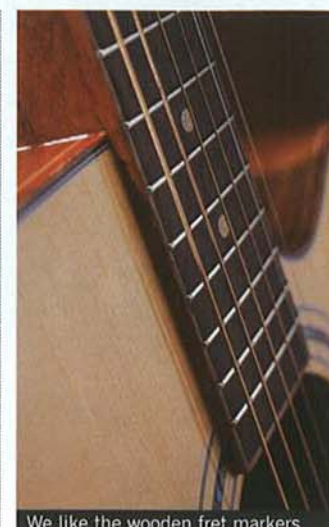
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### Technical Specification

Price: £699.95  
Built in: China  
Scale length: 646mm (25.4")  
Nut width: 44mm (1.73")  
Top: Solid Sitka spruce  
Back and sides: Solid mahogany  
Neck: Mahogany  
Fingerboard: Rosewood  
Frets: 20 medium  
Bridge: Rosewood  
Machineheads: Closed-back, gold anodised  
Weight: 1.8kg  
Finishes: High gloss  
Case: Hard case included  
Left-handers: No

### Contact Details

Access All Areas  
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We like the wooden fret markers



The neck is nicely chunky



Nice elegant headstock design

fine strummer, with a balanced and even tone, particularly when played lightly. The tone retains its integrity when played harder, but the volume when played hard is surprisingly lacking. It's not so much a quiet guitar – played gently it's comparable with most others – it's just that it doesn't respond to the heavy touch. Picked, however, the Apollo is a revelation, delicate and complex, like warm crystal rain. It's not that it sounds different from most spruce/mahogany combinations, it simply does what you expect, perhaps a little better than you expected, and better than similar guitars we've seen at higher price points. Again, the Apollo responds best to a light touch, with a wonderfully dynamic tonal response which whispers just as eloquently as it talks. A heavier touch doesn't yield a great deal more, and you would probably want to move to a spruce and rosewood combination to get really punchy fingerstyle tones.



The Presys is a welcome addition

### The Apollo responds best to a light touch, with a wonderfully dynamic tone

The unfortunate fact is that fingerstyle draws attention to the guitar's only real fault: a slight intonation problem. All of the strings play a few cents sharp across the fingerboard, and the low E is the worst, enough that, when playing an open-G chord, the differential between the bottom E fretted at the third and the open G is a little uncomfortable. This should be fixable with a bit of a setup, but it shouldn't be necessary.

The pickup system is impressive, and as expected allows you to mix a more natural tone with the



These are clearly quality woods

punchy piezo sounds we've become used to since the '80s. The combination of on-board notch filter and phase switch should make life very easy for your soundman as well, making this a very confidence-inspiring stage guitar. The 4 OC is arguably at the softer end of the spruce/mahogany tone, edging towards cedar territory, but for us, at least, it's an extremely pleasing tone.

### Summary

Freshman has lived up to its reputation for value for money with the Apollo 4 OC and produced a guitar which will please lovers of soft, complex tones. It's a shame the intonation lets it down a little, but we should give Freshman a break: this is the only model in the country, and Freshman may not have been able to give it the company's usual attention. A guitar shop should dial this issue out for you at no extra charge when you buy, and there's so much else to like about the Apollo 4 that we recommend fingerstylists in particular give it a try. **GB**

### What We Think

What did our test results reveal?

**Pros:** Lovely woody looks. Delicate, complex tone

**Cons:** Intonation requires tweaking.

**Ideal For:** Fingerstylists with an ear for the delicate.

### GB Rating

Rating out of five stars

Freshman Apollo 4 OC ★★★★★