



High-end timbers include quilted mahogany with maple/walnut binding



Gold-plated Grover Sta-Tites come with black buttons



Left, the FA600GA; right, the FA600DCE

**FACTFILE**  
**FRESHMAN**  
**FA600DCE**

DESCRIPTION Cutaway dread electro-acoustic. Made in China  
 PRICE £1995 inc hard case

BUILD As FA600GA except addition of scratchplate  
 OPTIONS See FA600GA  
 LEFT-HANDERS No  
 FINISH Gloss natural

SCALE 650mm/25.6"  
 NECK WIDTH  
 Nut 43mm  
 12th fret 53mm  
 DEPTH OF NECK  
 First fret 20mm  
 9th fret 23mm  
 STRING SPACING  
 Nut 35.5mm  
 Bridge 53mm  
 ACTION AS SUPPLIED  
 12th fret treble 2.0mm  
 12th fret bass 2.6mm  
 FINGERBOARD RADIUS 15"  
 WEIGHT 2.23kg/4.9lb

CONTACT Freshman Guitars, 01355 228028  
 www.freshmanguitars.co.uk

**Like the GA?**  
**Try this...**

**Breedlove**  
 American OM/SSE Spruce/sapele with ebony fingerboard and bridge plus Baggs Element Active system with soundhole volume and tone  
 RRP £2015

**Larrivee**  
 OM-05E Maple-bound spruce/mahogany OM with a one-piece neck plus an ebony fingerboard. Powered by Baggs dual-source iMix Notch  
 RRP £2004

**Like the DCE?**  
**Try this...**

**Takamine**  
 TV360SC Spruce/rosewood Nashville Series cutaway dreadnought with abalone purfling and rosette and CTP-2 CoolTube preamp  
 RRP £2182

**Martin**  
 DC-16GTE Spruce/sapele cutaway dread with gloss top. Roland's AP-1 gives seven-band EQ, auto feedback buster and tuner  
 RRP £1865

**FACTFILE**  
**FRESHMAN**  
**FA600GA**

DESCRIPTION Non-cutaway grand auditorium electro-acoustic. Made in China  
 PRICE £1995 inc hard case

BUILD Carpathian spruce top, quilt mahogany back and sides. Mahogany neck, with 20-fret walnut-bound ebony board. Ebony bridge, bone nut/saddle, gold Grover Sta-Tite tuners, two strap buttons. LR Baggs iBeam Active with under-bridge transducer, endpin preamp, soundhole volume wheel  
 OPTIONS Cutaway FA600GAC (£1995). Also see FA600DCE  
 LEFT-HANDERS No  
 FINISH Gloss natural

SCALE 650mm/25.6"  
 NECK WIDTH  
 Nut 43mm  
 12th fret 54mm  
 DEPTH OF NECK  
 First fret 20mm  
 Ninth fret 23mm  
 STRING SPACING  
 Nut 35.5mm  
 Bridge 53mm  
 ACTION AS SUPPLIED  
 12th fret treble 2.2mm  
 12th fret bass 2.7mm  
 FINGERBOARD RADIUS 15"  
 WEIGHT 2.11kg/4.65lb

# FRESHMAN

## FA600GA & FA600DCE

### ELECTRO ACOUSTICS

With the new 600 series Freshman is aiming to offer boutique specs at production prices, with electronics as standard. Review by **Jerry Uwins**

Since its introduction in 2002 as a predominately budget acoustic brand, Freshman has enjoyed burgeoning success partly as a result of progressively extending its catalogue upmarket. The latest additions, the 600 Series, continue this trend, with three case-inclusive models each retailing at just under £2000. All are electros using a Baggs iBeam Active system, and comprise non-cut and cutaway grand auditoriums plus a cutaway dreadnought. Their high-end pricing is reflected in premium-grade all-solid timbers and trim.

**FA600GA**  
 Freshman might call this a grand auditorium, but its size - just under 15.5" across the lower bouts - is more akin to a large OM than an outright GA whose body spans tend to approach 16". All three 600s share the same timber specs, leading aspects among which are a master-grade Carpathian spruce top and quilted mahogany back and sides. Carpathian, from the Ukraine, is highly regarded for its tonal quality and high stiffness-to-weight ratio, and compares favourably with Adirondack or German. The example here, subtly cross-silked, is beautifully clean and evenly grained.

The mahogany, stained to a deep reddy-brown, is a visual treat too, its sumptuous bookmatched patterning thrown into higher relief by the guitar's immaculate all-gloss livery. The body as a whole is bound in walnut with maple/walnut purflings, and walnut is also used to edge the abalone rosette. This is reprised on the one-piece mahogany neck, with a walnut-bound ebony fingerboard and a quilt-mahogany headstock overlay edged in walnut and maple. The black buttons on a dependable set of gold Grover Sta-Tites tie in visually not only with the fingerboard but the ebony

bridge too, which carries abalone-dotted ebony pins. All high-class detailing, as are the octave 'F' and leafy 11th-fret and 13th-fret motifs on the dot-markered fretboard. The full-scale neck, 43mm wide at the heel, is fashioned to a slick, moderate-depth 'C' profile and it plays like a good 'un, thanks to faultlessly dressed, highly polished fretting and a well set up action. Some of us would prefer a wider bridge string spacing than the 53mm offered, though in all fairness it doesn't feel unduly restrictive for fingerstyle work.

**Sounds**  
 Acoustic performance is well on the money. Delivering an appealing blend of folksome precision and openness, the tone is poised between an easy-going higher-range sunniness and a warm richness with projection in the lows. Dynamics are generous, as is volume for the body size. The iBeam, rather than employing an undersaddle pickup, uses a linear transducer fixed to the underside of the bridge plate, linked to an active endpin preamp with 'pre-tuned' EQ. There are no onboard tone controls, just a soundhole volume wheel. The system promotes a pure acoustic-like tone, and the results really do support

that claim with an impressively natural clarity allied to a full-bodied piano-like attack and a sweetly crystalline high-end texture. Cross-string output is well balanced, and there's plenty of gain. **FA600DCE**  
 Save for being a full-bodied cutaway dreadnought, the equally handsome DCE is a constructional re-run - including the neck profile and string spacing - of the GA, barring a couple of minor differences. First, a scratchplate is added; second, the neck heel, unlike the GA's pointed variety, has a flat-faced profile to optimise access into the cutaway. As a consequence, the strap button is secured to the side of the cutaway, not the heel itself.

**Sounds**  
 Though actually not that much louder than the GA, the DCE adds the required dreadnought ingredients. The sound image is broader, the bass is deeper and has more attacking 'thump', while the midrange is a shade thicker, enhancing the sense of projection. None of this, happily, is at the expense of underlying articulation, something it shares with its smaller-bodied counterpart. The other aspect in common is the high-quality powered performance endowed by the iBeam, and our above observations apply equally here.

**Verdict**  
 Freshman has two seriously good, pukka-looking electros here. Aside from their finely fettle sounds, both acoustically and powered, the enticement is being able to buy into top-notch materials and cosmetic finery along with what comes across as luthier-class workmanship - all at a price level most luthiers would find impossible to achieve given the guitars' specifications. Pro-market success for the 600s surely beckons. **G**

FINAL SCORE	
FRESHMAN FA600GA	
Build Quality	20/20
Playability	18/20
Sound	18/20
Value for money	18/20
Looks	18/20
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>92%</b>

FINAL SCORE	
FRESHMAN FA600DCE	
Build Quality	20/20
Playability	18/20
Sound	18/20
Value for money	17/20
Looks	18/20
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>92%</b>