LATEST FLAME

Prestige Eclipse Koa/Koa acoustic-electric

* BY ERIC KIRKLAND

PRESTIGE GUITARS have steadily gained favor and well-deserved respect in the past five years for their consistent quality, generous use of prized tone woods and tasteful application of eye-catching aesthetics. The company's new Eclipse Koa/Koa elevates visual beauty to a breathtaking level. Fashioned almost entirely from rare flamed koa, this instrument has impressive looks to match the sexy allure of its tones. If by chance the incomparable warmth of the Koa/Koa's sounds and golden-brown hues don't ignite your passions, Prestige also makes less lavish Eclipses in spruce/mahogany and spruce/rosewood combinations. But you'll have to get yours fast, because Prestige manufactures only 100 of these limited-edition Eclipse guitars each year, about 33 of each model. A hidden Fishman Matrix Ellipse Blend pickup system is optional, allowing guitarists to amplify the instrument without messing with its appearance.

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FEATURES

KOA WOOD IS found only in certain parts of Hawaii, making it rare and expensive. Koa also happens to be one of the most naturally stunning and prized tone woods, with midrange-heavy tones that are as deep as they are detailed. The Eclipse Koa/Koa utilizes these stunning solid slabs of this flamed island timber for its top, sides and back, with delicate wafers of maple and ebony surrounding the rosette and binding the top and back. As if the koa wasn't enough to knock your eyes out, glimmering abalone shell traces the top, circles the sound hole and separates the book-matched, arched koa back. My favorite detail is the padauk inlay that creates the Venetian cutaway's sculpted contour. The bridge is ebony, as are the tuning keys, truss-rod cover and maple-bound fretboard and headstock inlay.

Although this is actually built on a dreadnought scale, the Eclipse's cinched waist gives it the feel of an auditorium-sized acoustic and the tonal grace of a parlor guitar. Its mahogany neck also feels smaller and more manageable than you'd expect from a full-size acoustic, with the D-shaped carve providing just enough wood to stabilize the fretting hand. This relatively thin feel makes the Eclipse comfortable and familiar for players who spend most of their time on an electric.

An optional Fishman Ellipse Matrix Blend system is ingeniously hidden on the inside, top edge of the sound hole. This allows players to amplify and adjust the Koa/Koa's output without having an unsightly hole cut into the precious woods. Controls are provided for volume, mic/pickup blend, phase and mic trim.

PERFORMANCE

THE PRESTIGE ECLIPSE Koa/Koa immediately impressed me with its balanced, smooth and gentle tone. Where most acoustics are rather percussive and treble heavy, the koa wood creates exceptional sustain through all registers and an ear-caressing accent across the entire midrange field. The tones are deep but not dark, and the midrange tempers the highs. The Koa/Koa version of the Eclipse Series is also not a particularly loud or aggressive instrument. However, it's quite dynamic through its volume range, highlighting and separating nuances of sound with ubiquitous sweetness. For these reasons, fingerpicking best demonstrated the guitar's natural attributes. Picked notes were still exemplary of the koa's tonal characteristics but didn't fully exhibit the instrument's spectrum of colors. The Fishman system, although lacking equalization controls, is powerful and clear enough to deliver the Koa/Koa's sounds without exaggerating the acoustic responses.

THE BOTTOM LINE

THE PRESTIGE ECLIPSE Koa/Koa is a visually stunning acoustic, boasting a flamed koa body, appropriate uses of ebony, maple accents, abalone embellishments and a padauk inlay. It's also extraordinarily comfortable to play, thanks to a thin-contoured neck. Finger-pickers will revel in the koa's passionate response, and flatpickers will be surprised by the guitar's outstanding balance and control. **SC**

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SPECS

LIST PRICES $2,599.00; $2,849.00, as tested, with optional Fishman Matrix Ellipse Blend pickup system
MANUFACTURER Prestige Guitars Ltd., prestigeguitars.com
TOP Solid flamed koa spruce top with spruce X-bracing
BODY Auditorium, solid flamed koa sides; arched, flamed koa back; Venetian cutaway with padauk inlay; maple and ebony binding; abalone accents
NECK Mahogany, bone nut
FINGERBOARD Ebony, bound in maple, mother-of-pearl "Eclipse" inlays, 12-inch radius
SCALE LENGTH: 25.35 inches
FRETS 20
HARDWARE Ebony bridge and pins, compensated bone saddle, Gotoh 510 tuning machines with ebony keys
PREAMP Fishman Ellipse Matrix Blend pickup system
CONTROLS Volume, mic/pickup blend, phase button, mic trim
PICKUP Fishman

+PRO	-CON
EXCEPTIONAL FLAMED KOA • WARM AND DETAILED TONES • FAST NECK	NONE