

ACOUSTIC
GUITAR

5 Adirondack-Top Dreadnoughts Reviewed

By Teja Gerken and Scott Nygaard

Santa Cruz
GUITAR
COMPANY

HANDMADE, HANDED DOWN.

SPECS: Solid Adirondack spruce top. Solid mahogany back and sides. One-piece mahogany neck. Ebony fingerboard and bridge. Advanced scalloped X-bracing. Dovetail neck joint. 25.25-inch scale. 1 11/16-inch nut width. 23/16-inch string spacing at the saddle.

Nickel-plated Waverly tuners. Elixir Nanoweb strings. Nitrocellulose finish. Made in USA.

PRICE: \$8,950 list/\$8,100 street.

CONTACT: Santa Cruz Guitar Co.: (831) 425-0999; santacruzguitar.com.

Northern California's Santa Cruz Guitar Company is one of the pioneers of modern American custom guitar making and has been one of the top contenders in the high-end dreadnought game for most of its 35-year history. Built in a small-production environment, Santa Cruz dreadnoughts respect tradition without being slaves to vintage specs. The 1934 D Mahogany model Santa Cruz sent us for review is a custom version of its standard 1934 D, which, due to its Brazilian rosewood back and sides, sells for a dizzying \$18,500. You'll still need to save your pennies for the mahogany version, but except for the wood, it shares all the other specs of the rosewood 1934 D. Santa Cruz doesn't take the 1934 designation lightly, partially using woods the company claims were cut in the 1930s, hide-glue construction, and a thin nitrocellulose finish. But this is not an exact copy of a '30s D-18. For example, the guitar's bound fingerboard is plain, except for the Santa Cruz logo at the 16th and 17th frets. It also includes Santa Cruz's original bridge shape as well as an enlarged soundhole, in the style of the Tony Rice signature model.

The first thing you notice upon picking up the 1934 D, besides its vibe of astounding quality, is that it is light as a feather. A closer inspection reveals flawless craftsmanship inside and out. Of course, the instrument's materials are also top shelf, from its evenly grained Adirondack top to beautifully hued mahogany back, sides, and neck. The guitar's finish is so thin that the grain in the mahogany can be felt just by running a finger across the surface. The 1934 D's neck, which includes slightly triangular frets, has a fairly shallow, V-shaped profile. The guitar's action was set up on the high side—clarity and power were clearly more of a consideration than electric-guitar-like playability.



When it comes to tone, the 1934 D delivers bona fide mahogany dreadnought sound in spades. It's super-responsive, offers great complexity regardless of attack, and has smooth, even character throughout its fingerboard range. It's not the loudest guitar on the block (at least not in its brand-new state), meaning that it delivers beautifully detailed tones rather than brute force. As with all Santa Cruz guitars, of course, custom options abound, so if you're in the market for a high-end dreadnought made just for you, consider the 1934 D series as a serious base on which to build a dream guitar.