

You're a trained cabinet maker by trade. You play guitar. And you love resonators. So what's your long-term dream? To build them for a living, of course. That's John Alderson's story at any rate. Still moving towards achieving his goal of designing and making instruments full-time, John has spent years honing his craft, the result being his Delta resonators which are beginning to attract favourable comments from those in the know.

When did you first start messing around with guitar building?

I cut guitars to bits when I was at school to see how they work and I started actually building guitars for myself 20-odd years ago. It's one of those things that developed as time went on. I've had a Dobro for about 30 years and someone stood on the neck one time and I managed to fix it, so when I came across a couple of Nationals that people had – one without a neck and one with no cone – I reckoned I knew how to sort them out, and did and I learned something every time I took a job like that on. I started doing refrets and repair jobs for a local music shop about 20 years ago and I used to look inside Les Pauls and things and think "I could do that", so I did. I built myself one and got rid of a couple of Pauls that I had as a result. People would see me playing them at gigs and come up and ask me how I did it and I ended up building odd things for people. I'm now working towards doing it full-time.

But resonator instruments are your true love aren't they?

Absolutely. I've loved slide guitar for years and years and I do love the guitars, so naturally that's an area I've gravitated towards. I've spent a few years getting tooled up to build resonators and designing in innovative touches rather than just setting out to copy what's gone before. I'll still build other guitars if I'm asked though – it's not just resonator guitars that I do.

Have you had much advice from established builders as you've gone along or has it been a solitary pursuit?

I've known Rob Armstrong (extremely well-regarded UK acoustic builder) since school and I've taken him guitars at various stages and asked him what he's made of them. And it got to the point where he's just said, "You don't need me to tell you what's what", so he has been a great help.

Do you build metal-bodied resos as well as wooden types?

Yes, but it's the wooden ones I've been most concerned with so far. I don't want to give too much away, but there are certain features built into the wooden guitars that I'm very pleased with and that are a departure from the way many others are constructed. It's all about experimenting for me. For example, I've spent a long time fiddling about with the cones that I use in conjunction with Colin Oldham, who hand spins them

for me. We've tried various different thicknesses for different applications – the thicker ones come out more trebly so I've used them for bass strings to bring out some brightness there, and used thinner cones for the treble side in order to keep them nice and warm.

So how much will one of your handbuilt resonators cost?

I'm trying to bring a wooden version in at just under £1000. It'll still play and sound great, but I'll do away with some of the posh bits, the inlays and the pearloid covered headstock, things like that. I like the fact that basic resonators hark back to the origins of the instrument, a Duolian was a workman's guitar after all. So my aim is to have something to offer that is affordable but still high quality. A slightly more ornate version (like the tri-cone guitar illustrated here) starts at £1595 – there's a lot of work in those, what with the bound fingerboard and body and pearloid headstock.

Are the Deltas only available direct from you?

I'm looking to get some into stores too, so the guitars have some exposure on the street as it were, but I'll always welcome people coming to me direct. It's a difficult balance for one-man operations to strike – I don't want to over-stretch myself and end up with orders that I'm struggling to fulfil, but at the same time people need to know about the guitars. But things are certainly looking promising.

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Next month we'll be reviewing the tri-cone guitar here. So stay tuned...

