



# FRAMUS

## FP14 PARLOUR & FJ14 JUMBO

*Framus used the NAMM show at the start of the year to launch an expansion of its range of acoustic guitars, including new parlour and jumbo models. Sam Wise spends some time with this 'little and large' duo*

WORDS: SAM WISE IMAGES: RICHARD ECCLESTONE

From 1946 to 1977, German company Framus made good quality guitars at competitive prices. Perhaps the most notable among its customers was a young Paul McCartney. As punk rock dawned, Framus went out of business, but in 1995, the brand was revived as part of the Warwick Music Group, helmed by Hans-Peter Wilfer, son of founder Fred Wilfer, and once more produced acoustic and electric guitars and amps. Do they represent the same great value they did in the early 60s? Well, having the guitars manufactured in Asia keeps the prices reasonable, and this pair of solid top instruments, a spruce jumbo at £552, and a mahogany parlour at £390, makes for an interesting comparison.

These guitars, sat next to each other, make quite a contrast; the long narrow body of the 12-fret to body parlour accentuating the chubby form of the 14-fret jumbo. Both are good lookers though. The parlour's solid mahogany top is rich and beautiful, honestly more so than several more expensive mahogany instruments we've tested in recent months. The rosette is a simple pair of concentric rings, the outer abalone and the inner what appears to be dark mahogany, and the abalone stands out wonderfully against the dark top. The back and sides are mahogany veneer on laminate, which is missing the richness of the top, while a simple cream binding adds elegance. The moustache-like rosewood bridge has a fully compensated bone nut and ebony bridge pins with mother of pearl inlay dots for a touch of class. The 18-fret mahogany neck has a rosewood fingerboard, bound in cream, with simple mother of pearl dot markers, and at the north end, there's a bone nut, further evidence of a real focus on quality, and the slotted headstock with its three-on-



a-plate tuners adds a bit of vintage flair. The shorter scale, the 12th fret body joint and the deep set bridge conspire to make this quite a compact guitar. This, though the cheaper of the two guitars by some distance, is equipped with a Fishman Isys+ pickup system, consisting of an undersaddle piezo, a head unit with a tuner, volume, bass and treble controls, a phase switch and a battery box in the lower bout near the endpin, with an integrated jack socket. The FP14 doesn't look overstated, but it stands out.

The jumbo is another looker, though in a different style. The top (and there's plenty of it!) is Sitka spruce; not the most finely or evenly grained that you'll ever see, but good enough for the money. The same mahogany and abalone rosette is there, looking markedly different against the pale wood, but no less impressive, and this time, the top is bound in tortoiseshell. The back and sides are veneered in wonderfully flamed and figured maple (and ironically, the sonic qualities of solid maple are not a million miles from decent laminate), which looks incredibly luxurious. The same moustache bridge, bone saddle and ebony bridge pins, this time contrasting emphatically with the spruce, adds an unmistakable Framus flourish.

Here, the rosewood fingerboard is 21 frets, with a longer scale, on a maple neck, and without any binding. The headstock here is solid, faced with rosewood, which is stained so dark that it could easily be ebony, and inlaid with the same swooping Framus logo and a mother of pearl split diamond inlay. This simple, bold design is unexpectedly arresting, and is a real visual differentiator from other jumbos you might have seen. The jumbo on test doesn't come with a pick-up, but Framus offers a cutaway version – which has a different wood on the back and sides – that does.

## FRAMUS FP14 PARLOUR

### NEED TO KNOW

**Manufacturer:** Framus

**Model:** FP14

**RRP:** £390.61

**Body Size:** Parlour

**Made In:** China

**Top:** Solid mahogany

**Back and Sides:** Mahogany

**Bridge:** Indian rosewood

**Neck:** Mahogany

**Fingerboard:** Indian rosewood

**Frets:** 18

**Tuners:** Chrome, steel post style, ratio 15:1

**Nut Width:** 45mm

**Scale Length:** 628mm

**Onboard Electronics:** Fishman Isys+ Preamp with Sonicore pickup

**Strings Fitted:** Cleartone Acoustic EMP 012-053

**Gig Bag/Case Included:** No

### ACOUSTIC TEST RESULTS

**Pros:** Lovely, classy looks, soft and intimate tone

**Cons:** A little boxy if you strum really hard

**Overall:** A really lovely guitar that wants to sing softly to you

### ACOUSTIC RATING

**Sound Quality:** ★★★★★

**Build Quality:** ★★★★★

**Value for Money:** ★★★★★

**5 Stars:** Superb, almost faultless

**4 Stars:** Excellent, hard to beat

**3 Stars:** Good, covers all bases well

**2 or 1 Stars:** Below average, poor

### CONTACT DETAILS

[www.warwick.de/en/Framus](http://www.warwick.de/en/Framus)



It's an indication of how good both of these guitars are that they have been in constant use throughout the review period, and these have been given thorough workouts. The parlour is everything you would expect from such a small body: it's intimate and accommodating, and the 'C' section neck profile, while not remarkable, is fine. Top fret access is limited a little by the 12 fret join, but for most acoustic players, that's not a huge issue, and, as another writer once put it, "the money is all down at the other end anyway." Tonally, this guitar is absolutely at one end of the scale. Everything about it pushes in the same direction: shorter scales tend towards deeper, fatter tones, while mahogany tops soften the treble attack and add, to my ears, a chocolaty darkness to the mid-tones, in contrast to the warmth of the harmonics from cedar or redwood.

That tonal palette is exactly what you get from the FP14; it's dark and intimate, the trebles chiming pleasingly but softly, the mids dark and

blossoming, and the bass relatively muted and warm, if a little boxy. For fingerstyle, it's a real treat, the tone spreads beautifully if you give it the space it needs between the notes.

Start to strum, and the relative lack of bass response makes itself known, but this is a quiet-voiced guitar all round, and it doesn't feel inappropriate. Dig in and work it hard, and the limitation of the body size shows itself. It's still pleasant to listen to, but thrash away with a plectrum and you'll notice the bottom end hitting a wall. To be fair though, that's not what this guitar is about. It's for delighting you on the sofa, balladeering to your close friends, and when you need to be loud, plugging in. Treat it like a little guitar, and don't expect it to sound like a big one, and it will make you happy. Plugged in, it's good if not stratospheric. As is often the case, the piezo emphasises the treble a little and adds some punch, but the tone retains its signature, and we would be quite happy using this on stage.

**FRAMUS FJ14 JUMBO**

**NEED TO KNOW**

**Manufacturer:** Framus

**Model:** FJ14

**RRP:** £552.61

**Body Size:** Jumbo

**Made In:** China

**Top:** Solid A Sitka spruce

**Back and Sides:** AAA flamed maple

**Bridge:** Indian rosewood

**Neck:** Maple

**Fingerboard:** Indian rosewood

**Frets:** 21

**Tuners:** Chrome, closed, gear ratio 15:1

**Nut Width:** 45mm

**Scale Length:** 648mm

**Onboard Electrics:** None

**Strings Fitted:** Cleartone Acoustic 012-053

**Gig Bag/Case Included:** N/A

**ACOUSTIC TEST RESULTS**

**Pros:** Very pretty, with a pure and loud tone

**Cons:** We wish this version had a pickup

**Overall:** A fabulously punchy and classy looking guitar

**ACOUSTIC RATING**

**Sound Quality:** ★★★★★

**Build Quality:** ★★★★★

**Value for Money:** ★★★★★

**5 Stars:** Superb, almost faultless

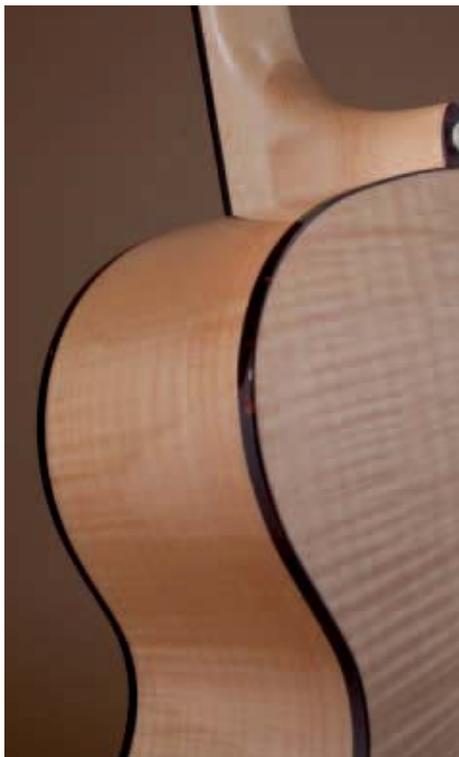
**4 Stars:** Excellent, hard to beat

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The jumbo is, in every way, a different kettle of haddock. Wider and deeper, it doesn't nestle into you the way the parlour does, but that's not to say it's a challenge, only that the contrast is noticeable. Where the parlour wants to lean towards you, turning up its fingerboard like a happy cat's belly, the jumbo, with its greater girth, tends to sit more upright and out-turned, making you look at the edge of the fingerboard instead. Tonally, it could not be more different; spruce and laminate is a bright combination, and its longer scale adds punch and chime, and again the jumbo answers true to form. Despite trying, we couldn't find a style we didn't enjoy playing on the jumbo. Compared to the cedar- or mahogany-topped big body alternatives, there is notably less warmth to the tone, but that is amply compensated for by the pure crystalline top end and powerful bass projection.

For fingerstyle, it's capable of being delicate and subtle, ringing and singing out at the top with a strong and direct underlying bass tone. Strumming is again rewarded with a powerful and punchy tone, loud and upfront. Pick up a

plectrum and it really demands your attention. We were working on a bluegrass tune during the review period, and the FJ14 excelled when flatpicking; the clarity and note definition left my other guitars in the dust, and if I could afford to keep it, I would, even though the lack of a pickup would be a challenge.

For £400, you're getting into all-solid territory, and at the jumbo's price point, there is plenty of all solid competition, but I would challenge you to find an all-solid for this sort of money which sounded better. My musical partner is desperately trying to scrape together the money to buy one. It's hard to imagine a stronger recommendation for the parlour than that, and the jumbo won a place in my heart too. You will not be choosing between these two; they are different beasts for different purposes, but if you're looking for an intimate fingerpicker, or a bold, brash flatpicker, then unless your budget extends to a hand-built boutique guitar, you should try these before you make your decision. I think many of you may end up buying one if you do. ■