



# GEAR

## REVIEW

# STAIRWAY TO HEAVEN

## Carvin's AE185-12

**M**ost guitarists love the sound of a 12-string, but the thought of owning one often raises several questions. Should you get an acoustic or an electric? What about controlling feedback onstage? And aren't they hard to tune? Carvin attempts to answer all of these questions with the AE185-12, a 12-string with both electric and piezo/acoustic pickups.

At first, the AE185-12 seems too good to be true: a thinline 12-string with both acoustic and electric tones, and weighing only 6.25 pounds. Moreover, this Carvin sports 24 frets on a thinner electric-style neck with the kind of super-low action the company is famous for. The guitar also has some formidable electronics. Interested? Thought so.

The test guitar was highly customized, featuring a mahogany body with a super-flamey maple top and a single f-hole (the stock version comes with an Englemann spruce top; see the website for available custom options). The AE185-12 neck is a through design and also made of mahogany. Its 24-fret ebony fingerboard has a 14" radius and Carvin's popular 25" neck scale. The neck also features a 1.69" nut and TUSQ saddle, with the strings feeding through the body. The headstock has Carvin's new 19:1 locking tuners (six per side), so any tuning concerns flew out the window – the AE185-12 stays in tune like a champ. The test instrument also had chrome hardware (standard), abalone diamond inlays (white pearl dots are standard), tortoise body binding (another custom touch), and an abalone Carvin logo on the headstock.

For electronics, the test AE185-12 was equipped with standard Carvin humbuckers (C22J neck and C22B bridge; again, custom options abound), as well as an LR Baggs Ribbon Transducer for acoustic tones. No surprise, this puppy runs on active power,

so a 9-volt battery compartment is located in the rear. For controls, there's a master volume and active tone for the humbuckers, along with a three-way pickup selector. The Baggs piezo system has an active tone circuit, and a Pan control to blend the

acoustic and electric sounds. Evensweeter are the separate output jacks for acoustic and electric signals, allowing the player

to route them to different amps or PA inputs. There's even a mono output to combine them for everyday convenience.

In the hand, the AE185-12 exhibits all the qualities that Carvin is famous for: a slim, super-fast neck with Carvin's Rapid Play setup, a light body that hangs comfortably on a strap, and controls that are conveniently located for tweaking on the fly. The neck profile is a flatter "C"

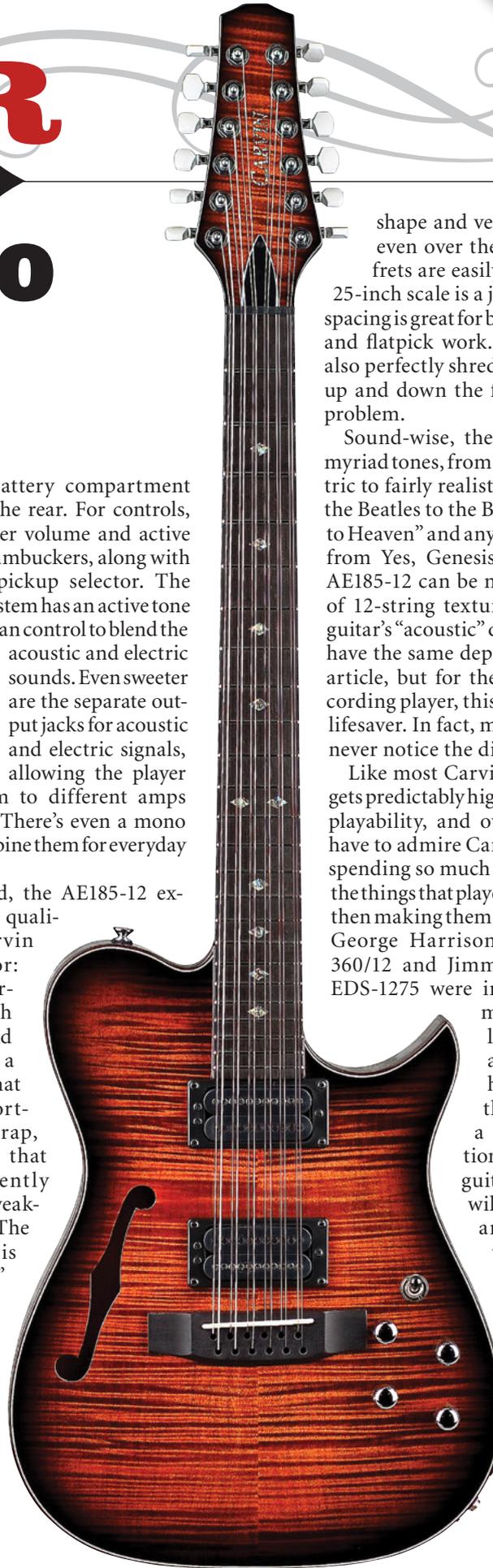
shape and very comfy to grip, even over the 15th fret (all 22 frets are easily accessible). The 25-inch scale is a joy, and the string spacing is great for both fingerpicking and flatpick work. The fast neck is also perfectly shred-ready – burning up and down the fingerboard is no problem.

Sound-wise, the AE185-12 offers myriad tones, from shimmering electric to fairly realistic acoustic. From the Beatles to the Byrds to "Stairway to Heaven" and any number of tracks from Yes, Genesis, or R.E.M., the AE185-12 can be mined for a world of 12-string textures. Granted, the guitar's "acoustic" dimension doesn't have the same depth as the genuine article, but for the gigging and recording player, this guitar could be a lifesaver. In fact, many listeners will never notice the difference.

Like most Carvins, the AE185-12 gets predictably high marks in sound, playability, and overall value. You have to admire Carvin designers for spending so much time figuring out the things that players really want and then making them reality. Certainly, George Harrison's Rickenbacker 360/12 and Jimmy Page's Gibson EDS-1275 were incredible instru-

ments, but it's quite likely that George and Jimmy would have drooled over the AE185-12. It's a terrific reinvention of the 12-string guitar and one that will appeal to electric and acoustic enthusiasts equally.

– Pete Prown VG



Price: \$1,239 (base retail)  
Info: [carvinguitars.com](http://carvinguitars.com)

