

CARVIN CT6M CALIFORNIA CARVED TOP

TESTED BY TERRY BUDDINGH



For decades, scientists have been exploring theories about the possible existence of parallel universes. For proof, they only need to look as far as Southern California, where Carvin has been occupying a parallel universe in the guitar manufacturing industry for more than 50 years. While other guitar companies have typically relied on sales through traditional “brick and mortar” stores, Carvin chose an alternative business strategy based on selling instruments and music gear to musicians directly from the factory.

Besides the obvious cost-cutting benefit of factory-direct sales, there are other advantages to Carvin’s less conventional marketing strategy—such as the fact that all basic Carvin models are available with a multitude of options the guitar buyer can select when he or she places an order. So, instead of getting an off-the-rack clone of a particular model, you can have yourself a uniquely personalized instrument.

CALIFORNIA DREAMIN’

With its eye-popping quilted-maple top, abalone block inlays, gold-plated hardware, and impeccable finish, our test-sample Carvin CT6M flaunts an irresistible abundance of aesthetic allure. You might expect to see a bolt-on neck in this modest price range, but the CT6M sports a one-piece, quarter-sawn mahogany neck that’s set deeply into its one-piece body. The neck is fitted with a two-way adjustable truss-rod along with two internal

graphite rods for enhanced strength and stability.

The headstock features a quilted-maple veneer with matching finish, and is highlighted with a tastefully understated gold Carvin logo. The vintage-style “snakehead”-shaped headstock is reinforced with a graceful volute, and the expertly cut Teflon-impregnated graphite nut provides the perfect string height at the first fret. Locking Sperzel tuners and a Tune-o-matic-style bridge are standard equipment on the CT6M (Floyd Rose or Wilkinson bridges are available as options), and the strings anchor to the body through six gold-plated brass ferrules. Our test guitar arrived with moderately low action and a hint of neck relief, and its frets were highly polished for a silky-smooth feel. The neck melts in your hand like warm butter as its thickness tapers slightly towards the nut, and, thanks to its outstanding setup, the CT6M earns high honors for feel and playability.

The CT6M comes with Carvin’s newest pickups: a C22N in the neck position and a C22B in the bridge. Carvin has been winding pickups since the ‘40s, and the C22-series humbuckers are wound with the same vintage-style enamel magnet wire they used in the old days. (Unlike the old days, however, Carvin now uses modern winding machinery to monitor the process and ensure more consistent results.) They’re also fitted with “pre-aged” alnico-5 magnets for authentic, vintage-flavored tone.

The C22 pickups feature 11 polepieces per coil to provide consistent output

when bending strings (with a standard 6-pole pickup, there’s typically a volume drop as the string is pushed away from its accompanying polepiece). The C22N neck pickup is wound to specs similar to a vintage humbucker, and the C22B bridge pickup is considerably “over-wound” for more output. (I measured a vintage-like DC resistance of 7.4k Ω for the C22N, and a healthy 13.6k Ω for the C22B.) To further enhance output, the C22B has a special alnico-5 magnet that’s twice as thick as a vintage humbucker’s.

The controls consist of Volume and Tone, plus a 3-way gold-plated Gibson-style pickup selector. Pulling the Tone knob disables the outer coils of each pickup for brighter single-coil textures. Another hip electronic feature is the Snag microchip that’s embedded in every Carvin guitar. When scanned, this tiny chip verifies ownership by transmitting the instrument’s registration information.

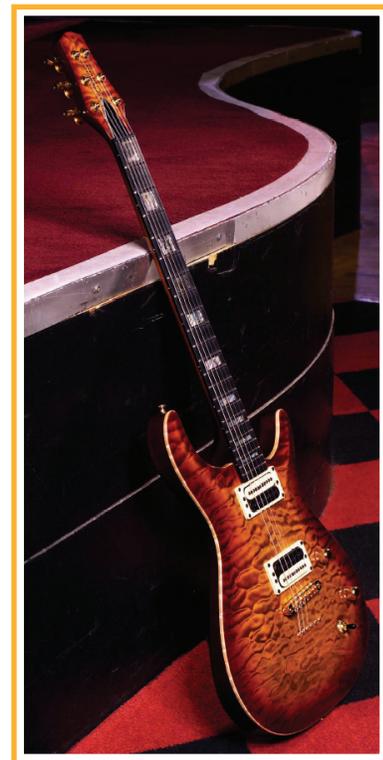
CARVIN’ TONES

Strummed acoustically, the CT6M possesses an inherently open and clear sweetness that’s reminiscent of a fine flat-top guitar. Its delicate complexity hints of a seasoned vintage voice, and, sure enough, the CT6M sounded best when paired with the sort of vintage-style amps that could faithfully reproduce all of the guitar’s nuances and textural complexities. Plugged into a vintage 50-watt Marshall and a 4x12, and with its bridge pickup in humbucker mode, the CT6M produced outstanding British-style

kerrang. The high-output C22B pickup sounded surprisingly crisp and detailed, considering it’s wound with almost twice as much wire as a vintage humbucker (more wire usually means less high-frequency response). Through a 2x10 tweed Fender Super, and with the bridge pickup switched to single-coil mode, the CT6M produced respectable, country-approved chime and cluck. Carvin adds a 180pF capacitor across the guitar’s Volume pot, and this really helps keep the highs sweet and clear when you roll down the Volume control. The CT6M’s delicately detailed textures are perhaps even better suited for EL84-powered amps. With either pickup in humbucker or single-coil mode, a Vox AC30 appreciably magnified the guitar’s chimy effervescence.

PROPS TO THE TOPS

Carvin deserves lots of credit for providing quality instruments at reasonable prices, and for staying the course on their direct-only business approach for over a half century. Representative of the highest level of the luthier’s art, and offering great playability and great tones, the CT6M is proof positive that Carvin does indeed deserve a place alongside the world’s most respected guitar builders. Here’s to the next 50 years of Carvin guitars!



SPECS

- 111/16" nut width
- 25"-scale ebony-onmahogany set neck
- 22 frets
- Mahogany body with quilted-maple top
- Sperzel locking tuners
- Tune-o-matic-style bridge, with throughbody stringing
- Abalone block inlays
- Carvin C22N and C22B humbucking pickups
- Factory strings: Elixir Nano Web, .010-