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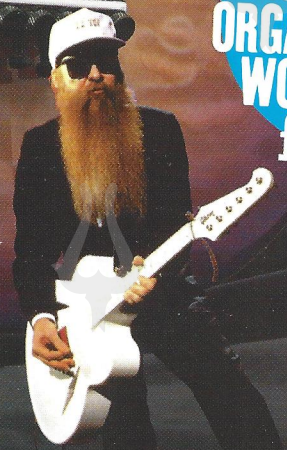
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DAI ANOTHER DAY

REUNITED OVER 25 YEARS SINCE THEY WERE MADE, THESE RARE ACOUSTICS ARE THE TRIUMPHANT RESULT OF A LONG AND HOPEFUL SEARCH. PAUL ALCANTARA UNWINDS THE STORY OF DAION & THE SHOOTER

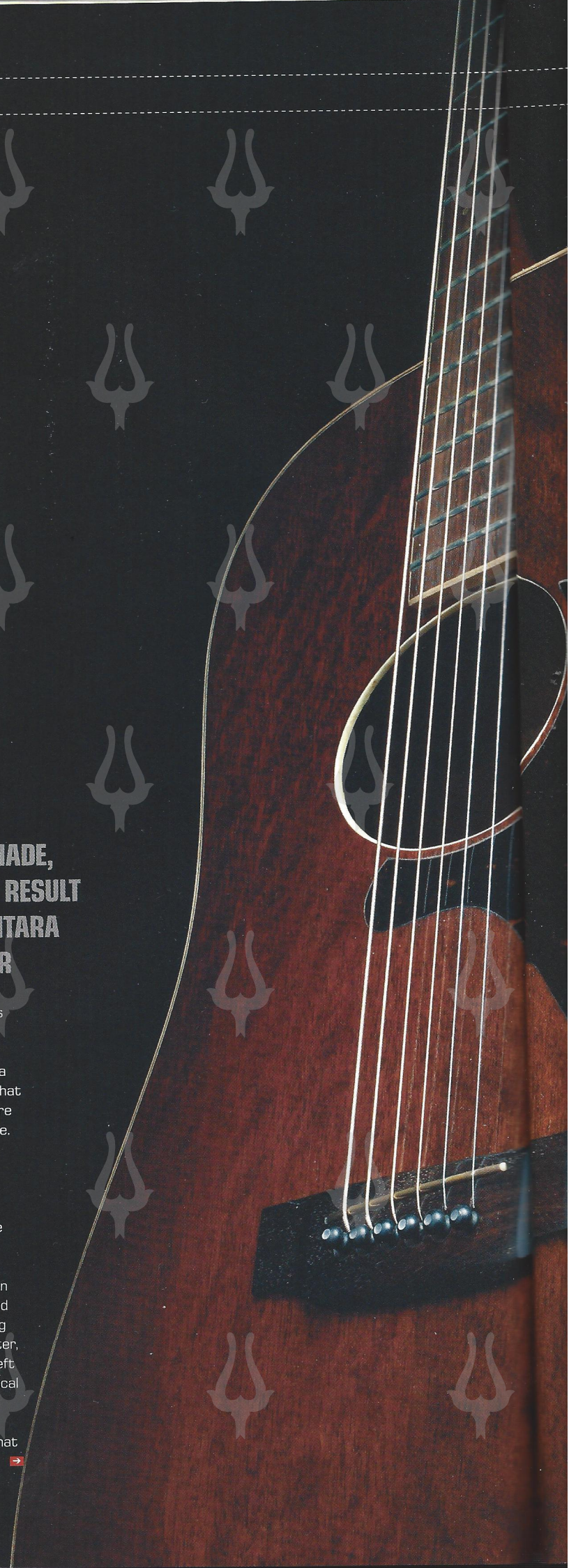
The month's featured guitars belong to GB photographer par excellence, Richard Ecclestone. When he's not shooting guitars, Richard also enjoys a parallel career as singer/songwriter Ecki (check out his website at www.ecki.co.uk). Having searched in vain for a Daion guitar for the best part of 10 years, Richard stumbled on not one, but two Daion model '80s up for grabs on the online auction site, eBay. Richard did what had to be done and the Daion duo are now safely ensconced at his Cambridge home.

For a few brief years, beginning in the late 1970s, the Daion brand name appeared on a series of high quality acoustic and electric guitars, only to vanish, seemingly without a trace, a few years later. Though some Daion acoustics were similar

to the CF Martin-inspired flattops produced by numerous other Japanese manufacturers of the period, the company also offered a number of more original designs that included the six-string and the rare 6/12 twin-neck acoustic seen here.

BIG SOUND UNDER HAPPY TREES

The story of the Daion brand can be traced back to 1962, when one Yasuyuki Teradaira left the large Japanese music distributor Zenon to start an instrument distribution company of his own, that he named Daion (which apparently means 'big sound' in Japanese). Five years later, Yasuyuki's brother Kazuyuki also left Zenon, and began producing classical guitars under the name Yamaki, which delightfully translates as 'happy trees on the mountain.' What a remarkably compact language! ➔



Vintage
COLLECTABLE
GUITAR BUYER



By the early 1970s, Yamaki had expanded to include a comprehensive line of steel-string guitars. These were distributed exclusively through Daion, which at the time also handled instruments from the Shinano, Mitsura Tamura, Chaki, and Hamox companies, as well as importing Harptone guitars from the United States. Towards the end of the decade, a newly designed line of innovative acoustics, electro-acoustics and solid-body guitars was launched under the Daion brand name and the Yamaki name was dropped.

Despite an aggressive marketing campaign, however, the early 1980s proved an inauspicious time to launch a new line of acoustics. The future of popular music, it seemed, lay with keyboards, and what little interest remained in the guitar was focused almost exclusively on electric instruments. The Daion brand name limped on for a few years, but by the mid-1980s it was gone.

THE YEAR SERIES

Richard's guitars are from the 'Year' series, which Daion described in company literature as its 'standard of excellence,' going on to declare each model 'as different as the year it's named for'. Other lines catalogued include the acoustic 'Mark' and 'Legacy' series guitars, and the electric Alembic-like through-neck

'Power' series, plus the bolt-neck 'Savage' series models.

By the early 1980s, the 'Year' series comprised several mahogany-bodied dreadnoughts, including the spruce-topped '78 Century, solid cedar topped '78 Heritage (also available as a 12 string) and model '79, which came with a choice of solid cedar or spruce top, and black or brown finish. The model '80, with its oval soundhole, was catalogued in both six and 12-string

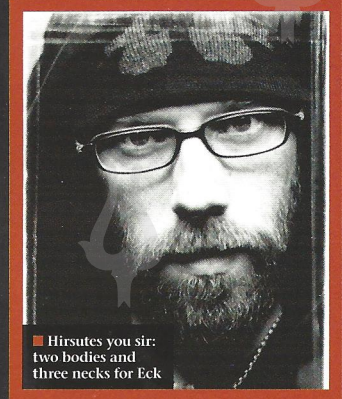


DAION QUEST

THE PROUD OWNER SHARES HIS EBAY FISHING STORY....

■ **"The first time that I heard a Daion guitar was back in the mid-1990s," explains GB photographer Richard Ecclestone. "I was booking musicians for a pub gig in the Lowestoft area."**

"John Ward, a local singer/songwriter, had a model '80 and a '78 that he swore by. But it wasn't just John that favoured Daions, it seemed that all of the best acoustic musicians in the area played the brand! I can remember five individual Daions at least – one an '80 and the rest '78s. It wasn't until I moved away and drifted into the dubious world of taking pictures for guitar magazines that I realised just how rare Daions were. 90 per cent of the guitar journalists that I spoke to had never heard of the brand, and virtually all of the shops I tried hadn't either. It began to dawn on me that finding one might be rather more difficult than I had anticipated! "Eventually, patience paid off and a '78 Heritage came up on e-Bay. To my surprise, it went for £650, and although I was gutted, I realised that; a) I wasn't alone in my search for the brand, and



■ Hirsutes you sir: two bodies and three necks for Eck

b) I needed to rethink my bidding strategy, or I would miss the next one to surface!

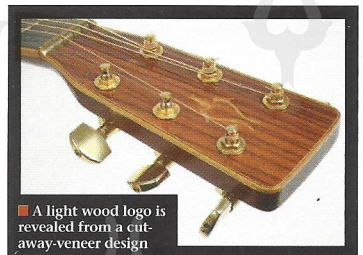
"Then a few months ago, the two featured here appeared on eBay within a week of each other. 10 years' searching, and then two show up at the same time! After winning one, I felt duty bound to reunite the pair.

"And when I finally played them, was I disappointed? Not a bit! The '80 has a presence that sets it apart from anything else I've played, and the twin-neck is a hoot. Perhaps I'd better learn 'Stairway To Heaven' after all!"

"JAPANESE FACTORIES OF THE PERIOD EMPLOYED SIGNIFICANT AMOUNTS OF HAND LABOUR"

versions, as were the '81 Caribou and '81 Gazelle electro-acoustics, and the jumbo-sized model '82.

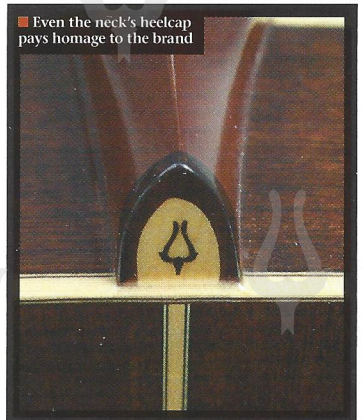
One of Daion's more expensive dreadnought-sized acoustic six-strings, the model '80, was priced at \$529, just below the rosewood-bodied Mark V listed at \$539 and the model '79 which sold for \$549.



■ A light wood logo is revealed from a cut-away-veneer design

OUR GUITARS

The model '80's headstock has a squared-off top section and well rounded corners, that are similar in appearance to that seen on Martin guitars of the period. Faced with rosewood, it displays the Daion logo, which is cut through the veneer to expose the lighter-coloured wood beneath. The front of the headstock is bound in alternating strips of both light and dark wood, while the rear proudly carries the Daion brand name, along with a set of gold-plated, Schaller-style sealed tuners.



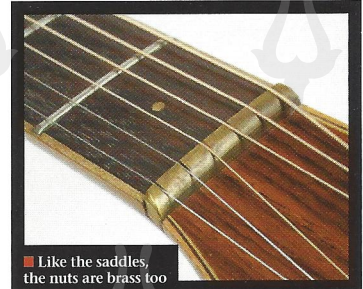
■ Even the neck's heelcap pays homage to the brand



The mahogany neck and headstock meet with a scarf joint that runs parallel to the fingerboard; the latter constructed from rosewood and bound with a single layer of maple. Though more commonly found on electric guitars, brass was a favoured material during the 1970s and early '80s, and it is employed here for the nut, position markers, side dots and bridge saddle. The neck has a glued-on heel complete with a rosewood cap, the maple inlay of which, once again, displays the Daion logo. The inlay's somewhat asymmetrical appearance draws attention to the fact that Japanese factories of the period still employed a significant amount of hand labour. In fact, the Daion catalogue makes much of this, pointing out that although it is necessary that some steps be performed by machine, it is essential that most steps be performed by hand.



Each headstock bears the Daion name, along with enclosed schaller-style tuners



Like the saddles, the nuts are brass too

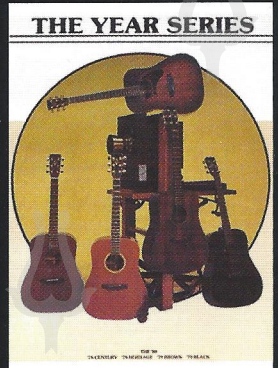
"IT TAKES A LITTLE PRACTISE TO MOVE ADEPTLY FROM ONE NECK TO THE OTHER"

Joining the neck at the 14th fret, the model '80's dreadnought-sized body has laminated mahogany back and sides. This is confirmed by a peek through the soundhole, which reveals a grain pattern on the inside that doesn't match that on the exterior. Though at first glance the top of the

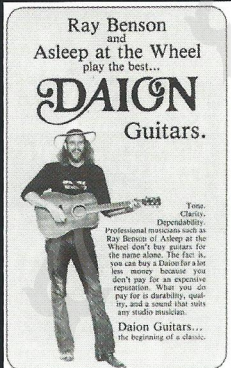
instrument also appears to be laminated, the catalogue explains that it is in fact constructed from a section of solid spruce, veneered with a .03mm bookmatched ovangkol facing (a dark brown wood of African origin, ovangkol has an appearance somewhere between that of rosewood and mahogany). Both top and back are bound with alternating strips of light and dark hardwood with an outer layer of maple, and, while there is no rosette, plastic

DAION TO TELL YOU

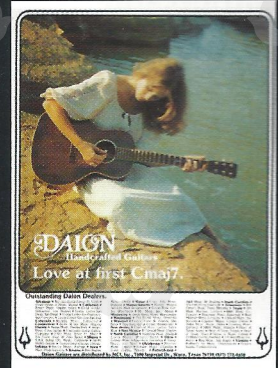
SOME OF THE ORIGINAL DAION ADVERTISING AND PROMO MATERIAL...



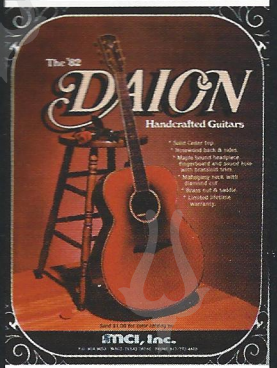
Here is Daion's original 1980s promo for the Year Series. Note our six string at the top



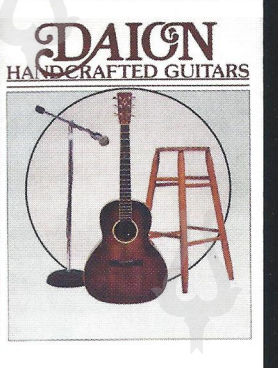
Daion's artist roster included Ray Benson from Asleep At The Wheel, as you can see here



Love at first Cmaj7? It is too – nice attention to detail with the chord!



An original US ad for the '82 model, placed by MCI Inc from Waco, Texas

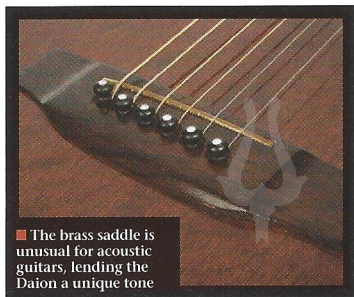


This is the front page of the original Daion catalogue. Stool, mic, guitar... We like the simplicity

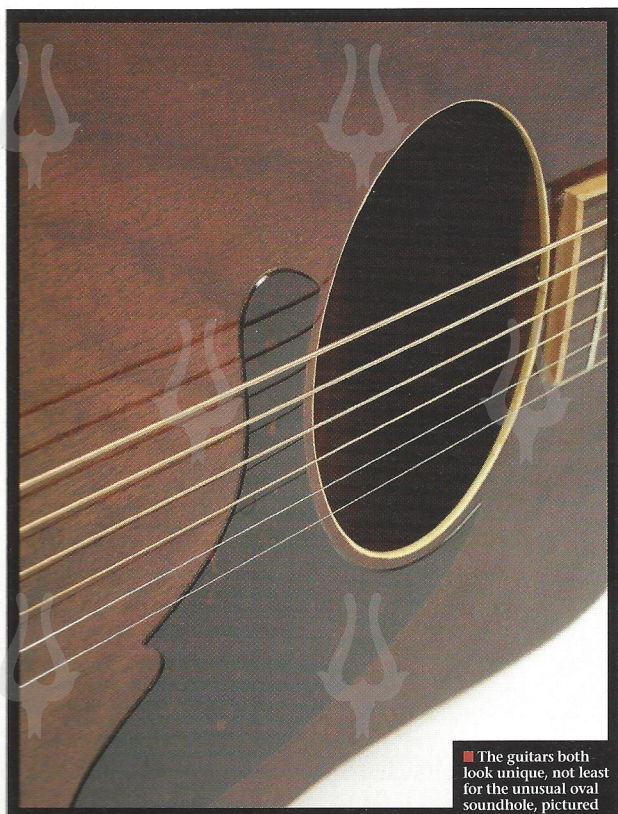
binding around the inside edge of the guitar's oval soundhole serves to hide the area where the spruce top and ovangkol overlay meet.

The Martin-shaped rosewood belly-bridge has a compensated saddle and matching rosewood bridge pins, that are inlaid with pearl dots (the endpin, which would originally also have been rosewood, has been substituted here with a white plastic replacement). A distinctively-shaped tortoiseshell plastic pickguard complements the front of the guitar's 'hand-stained dark mahogany sunburst finish'. The interior appears reasonably clean and tidy, the top of the guitar reinforced with a single X brace.

Set up with medium-sized frets, a low action and light-gauge strings, the Daion '80 plays like butter, though despite its dreadnought shape, it is not in the least bass



■ The brass saddle is unusual for acoustic guitars, lending the Daion a unique tone



■ The guitars both look unique, not least for the unusual oval soundhole, pictured

heavy. The combination, however, of a large body and 25.4 inch scale length ensures that the guitar is reasonably loud. The catalogue describes Daion instruments as having 'crisp highs and unmulled lows, perfectly balanced to each other' – a statement that, on the strength of our guitar, is hard to argue with.

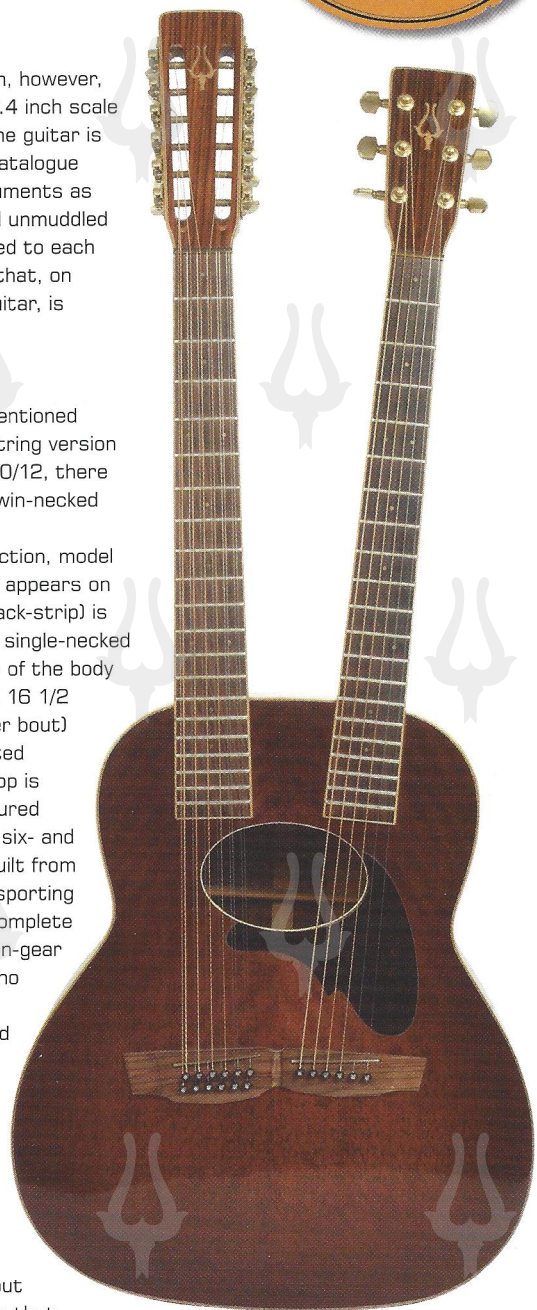
TWIN NECK

Although the above-mentioned catalogue lists a 12-string version of the '80 as model '80/12, there is no mention of the twin-necked version we have here.

In terms of construction, model 80W (this designation appears on the guitar's interior back-strip) is almost identical to its single-necked sibling. Back and sides of the body (which measures a full 16 1/2 inches across its lower bout) are once again laminated mahogany, while the top is solid spruce with a figured ovangkol veneer. Both six- and 12-string necks are built from mahogany, the latter sporting a slotted headstock complete with side-mounted open-gear tuners – an attempt, no doubt, to cut back on the guitar's weight and improve its overall balance. Interestingly, the extra wide bridge is constructed from a single piece of mahogany.

Using a mirror to look inside the guitar, it's possible to make out an extra pair of braces that run parallel to the treble side of the central X brace, thereby forming a frame around the ply bridge pads.

In use, the twin neck proves to be surprisingly comfortable. Its necks are set at diverging angles, giving ample space between them. It takes a little practise to move adeptly from one neck to the other, but you soon get the hang of it. The concept is more than a novelty – both Zeppelin's Jimmy Page and John Paul Jones have owned and played twin-, or even triple-necked acoustics at one time or another – and the ability to use the 12-string neck for rhythm and then move seamlessly to the six string neck for lead breaks is a real advantage. And, of course, it looks so fabulously over-the-top.



CLOSING THOUGHTS

This pair of Daion guitars makes a lovely example of how interesting, good quality, collectable guitars needn't always have a mega-famous brand-name on the headstock, or indeed be older than the hills. They're of huge musical and sentimental value to their owner, and they're also not so stupidly expensive that they need to remain largely unplayed, under lock and key. Not only that, but their relative rarity as a pair makes them all the more interesting – a pleasure to take a look at. **GB**

■ Thanks goes to Michael John Simmons for sharing information on the Yamaki connection, and of course Ecki for loan of the guitars.