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THE DAION '81 CARIBOU

BY MICHAEL WRIGHT
THE DIFFERENT STRUMMER

A “perfect storm” vintage guitar combines innovative design, excellent build, and a great story. Break out your rainslickers for the Daion Caribou cloudburst!

Involving significant names from both sides of the Pacific, including Yamaki and MCI, its tale begins in Japan after World War II, when brothers Yasuyuki and Kazuyuki Teradaira were hired at instrument maker Tatsuno Mokko. Some sources claim the company later divided into separate businesses, one being Hayashi Gakki. Others say Hayashi was purchased by music distributor Zen-on in 1954 or in '68 and they started making guitars (the discrepancies are unimportant to our narrative).

Yasuyuki Teradaira apparently quit to found a trading company called Daion in 1962. His brother departed in '67 to found Yamaki Guitars. Yamaki guitars were acoustics based mainly on Martin's designs. Daion distributed Yamakis. Another source identifies Hirotsugu Teradaira, presumably a son (or relative) of the founder, as Yamaki's chief guitar designer. Daion's later literature describes Teradaira as “a major Japanese guitar designer and a pioneer in the use of brass and solid cedar as design criteria.” As intimated in Daion catalogs, the notion of emphasizing cedar came from classical guitars. Yamaki, by the way, produced spectacular acoustic guitars, including some five-star classics.

After this point, the chronology becomes even more unreliable. Apparently, Teradaira became dissatisfied producing Martin-style guitars and started developing more-original designs. Whether this was before or after Daion connected with MCI has yet to be determined, and is probably also unimportant.

At some point, Daion began selling Yamaki-made guitars to MusiConics International, Inc. (MCI, but not the entertainment outfit that owned Univox) of Waco, Texas. Founded in '67, we know MCI as the company behind the famous (or infamous) Guitorgan. One source has Daion selling guitars to MCI “in the late '60s,” but unless they were providing guitars to house Guitorgan electronics (which is possible, but unlikely), it was probably later. Another source traces Teradaira's disaffection with making Martin copies to “the early '70s,” which seems much more likely. Whether MCI sold Yamaki-brand guitars supplied by Daion is unknown. In any case, it's certain Teradaira's newly designed guitars were made by Yamaki but branded as Daion and distributed in the U.S. by MCI.

In '78, MCI sent a letter to dealers announcing availability of the new Daion line – “... the result of a collaboration between MCI and Hirotsugu Teradaira.” Whether that “collaboration” was actual design input or

of a “give me six of those and eight of those” nature, we don’t know.

The first Daions sold by MCI in ’78 were the Heritage and Mark Series – Martin-inspired dreadnoughts with cedar tops and nuts and saddles made of brass. Classical guitars were added in ’79. With the Legacy Series of 1980, the designs moved dramatically away from Martin and introduced an acoustic/electric option.

Daion debuted electric guitars in 1981 with the Power and Savage Series solidbodies, the Headhunter semi-hollow, and the Caribou and Gazelle hollowbodies.

The Caribou and Gazelle were essentially the same except the Caribou had a solid cedar top and laminated maple sides and backs, while the Gazelle sported solid spruce and laminated rosewood. Both are quite fetching! Following the Daion theme, brass was used wherever practical.

Factory-installed piezo pickup systems were becoming popular at the dawn of the ’80s.

Still primitive (though not necessarily bad) they had simple shoulder-mounted Volume and Tone controls. Overall, it gave it a respectable sound, though it was still an “acoustic/electric” tone – very different from using an exterior mic to amplify



The Caribou's preamp control panel.

an acoustic. Finish options were brown, tan, and wine red.

Yamaki offered several acoustic series of its own brand, reflected in the Daion line and including The Year Series that stuck the date of a model's introduction to its name, so this is actually called “The ’81 Caribou.” This gets a little awkward if the model survives into ’82 – which both did! These have date-encoded serial numbers which are either YXXXXX or YYXXXX. This is #169054 from 1981.

The Daion/MCI partnership lasted at least until September of ’83, when the last known ad appeared. There's a brochure dated ’82, and there's currently no hard evidence Daion guitars survived beyond that. Online sources claim Daions were sold with other brand names in non-U.S. markets, that the Daion Trading Company went out of business at this time, and that Yamaki made guitars until the '90s, when it became a guitar-parts company. This may all be true, but it's challenging to confirm such claims. Purely coincidental is the



DAION HANDCRAFTED GUITARS



Daion's 1981 brochure, featuring its Caribou and Gazelle models.

THE '81 SERIES



THE '81 SERIES
Designed for the professional guitarist, the '81 is an incredible instrument. From the handpicked wood to the high quality electronics, no short cuts are taken. Each is handcrafted to precision specifications.

Truly a dual purpose instrument.
The '81 is an excellent acoustic guitar with no amplification. The high output transducer built in under the bridge excels beautifully reproducing the acoustic sound when amplified. The arched back and solid wood top project resonance and enhance tonal quality.

The unique appearance is also functional. The round cutaway provides total fret access and the contoured lower bout permits quick clearance. Slide pots are used for volume and tone control and are located on the upper bout near the neck.

The '81 is easily the most advanced electric acoustic guitar.

'81 CARIBOU/TAN
'81 CARIBOU/BR
'81 CARIBOU/WR-12
'81 GAZELLE

'81 CARIBOU & CARIBOU/12

- Electric acoustic guitar with built-in transducer
- Available in Tan, Wine Red and Ebony
- Solid Cedar top with oval sound hole
- Maple arched back & sides
- Round cutaway for easy access to the top fret
- Negative bottom for new appearance and jack clearance
- 3 piece Maple/Rosewood neck
- Rosewood fingerboard
- Brass nut and compressed brass bridge saddle
- High output original transducer under the saddle
- Slide volume and tone pots with-Melita mounting ring
- Original-shaped headstock with bass logo play
- Gold-plated rotomatic-type machine heads
- Light gauged strings

'81 GAZELLE & GAZELLE/12

* Same specifications as '81 Caribou except with solid Spruce top and Rosewood arched back and sides.

GUITARS...

The following series of pictures point out how much of each DAION guitar is carefully handcrafted. Although many machine processes are used, certain procedures are better done by hand.

Wood in the guitar maker is as gold and silver to the jeweler. DAION maintains a large supply of the finest woods available to ensure proper aging and to provide a wide selection. The wood is placed in a "drying chamber" for one to two years, the period of time depending upon the type of wood, during which time the moisture content of the wood is reduced to 7%.

The wood is then allowed to reseason naturally until the proper moisture content is obtained. This slow aging process virtually eliminates many problems caused by shrinkage (problems inherent in so many other guitars today) whose wood is rapidly kiln-dried and more adequately prepares the wood for the best tonal response.

Woods are carefully selected for grade, strength, grain, and color.

Naturally, the sound hole purfling is engraved by machine, but

skillfully inlaid by hand to insure proper fit.

Each brace is hand-glued, placed in a press to assure proper bonding.

then carefully hand-shoved to guarantee maximum tonal response and balance. It is this process which helps give DAION guitars their rich bass and brilliant treble response.

Each body brace is shaped by hand with a small chisel in accordance with the curvature of the guitar's body. This task is very tedious and time-consuming and requires much skill, but it is important to the overall resonance of the guitar's back and top.

This method of joining the top and the sides ensures the exact placement of the top, and achieves a slight "crowning" effect.

The neck is rough-shaped with power tools, then shaved by the final size and shape. The fingerboard is then hand-shaved to the neck to ascertain proper fret placement and intonation.

DAION guitars are hand-stained to preserve and enhance the natural beauty of the grain.

Proper string alignment and scale length are the concerns of the workers who hand-set each bridge. Adjustments in nut and saddle height, and in neck tension, are made next—all by hand.

A qualified guitarist does the final playtesting and makes any final adjustments. In performance, he should find a defect which was not discovered during the on-going quality control process, he will send the instrument back.

fact Washburn's acoustic and electric offerings from the period sure look like Yamaki products and show up on Japanese websites devoted to Yamaki; Washburn's Wing Series is very similar to Daion's... and were offered from '78 to '83.

There's no way to tell if Daion guitars are rare birds, but they are

not plentiful. A random check online turned up about a half-dozen for sale. A gut impression is that there were far more solidbodies than acoustics sold. So, though it's not raining Daions, they present an interesting collecting niche – well-made guitars with classy aesthetics and a compelling pedigree! **VG**

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 - '55 Sunburst "Brand-New" condition, perfect collector's piece!!
 - '55 Sunburst "Hardtail" One piece Ash body, Clean!!
 - '56 Sunburst (Ash & Alder body)
 - '56 Sunburst Lefty Perfect collector's piece.
 - '57 Sunburst 3 in stock.
 - '57 Sunburst "Hardtail" We have 2 in stock.
 - '57 Mary Kaye Perfect Collector's piece!!
 - '58 Sunburst Mint Condition, Perfect Collector's piece!!
 - '58 Mary Kaye Perfect Collector's piece!!
 - '58 Blond Perfect Collector's piece!!
 - '58 Sunburst "Lefty"/Maple neck "Near Mint condition"

- '59 Sunburst/Slab Rose neck 100% original in Near Mint.
- '59 Olympic White/Slab Rose neck
- '60 Sunburst/Slab Rose neck We have 5 in stock.
- '60 Sunburst "Hardtail"/Slab Rose neck
- '60 Olympic White/Slab Rose neck "Mint condition"
- '61 Sunburst/Slab Rose neck we have 3 in stock
- '61 Sunburst "Tortoiseshell Pickguard"/Slab Rose neck
- '61 Fiesta Red/Slab Rose neck 100% original in 8.10/10
- '62 Sunburst/Slab Rose neck We have 2 in stock.
- '62 Sunburst "Tortoiseshell Pickguard"/Slab Rose neck
- '62 Olympic White/Slab Rose neck We have

- 3 in stock
- '62 Sunburst/Round Rose neck We have 3 in stock.
- '63 Sunburst 100% original.
- '63 Sunburst "Hardtail" 100% original.
- '63 Olympic White We have 2 in stock.
- '63 Candy Apple Red
- '64 Sunburst ('63 Spec) we have 4 in stock.
- '64 Lake Placid Blue ('63 Spec)
- '64 Dakota Red (Transition logo)
- '64 Lake Placid Blue (Transition logo)
- '65 Sunburst We have 2 in stock
- '65 Olympic White
- '65 Candy Apple Red we have 2 in stock
- '65 Burgundy Mist Metallic
- '65 Black
- '65 Lake Placid Blue
- '66 Sunburst We have 3 in stock
- '66 Fire Mist Gold 100% original!!

- '67 Blond
 - '67 Chacoal Frost Metallic & Sonic Blue
 - '67 Candy Apple Red
 - '69 Fiesta Red
 - '69 Olympic White & Blond/Rose neck
 - '69 Candy Apple Red
 - '69 Olympic White & Blond/Rose neck
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