

UNDERSTANDING CONDITION FACTORS

Rating the condition factor of a guitar is, at best, still subjective, while at worst, totally misrepresentative. We've attempted to give a few examples of things that may affect the pricing and desirability of vintage acoustic guitars, but it's almost impossible to accurately ascertain the correct condition factor (especially true on older instruments) without knowing what to look for - which means having the instrument in your hands (or someone else's who has checked it out). Even then, three different experienced sources will probably come up with slightly different grades, not to mention different values based on different reasons. Listed below are major factors to consider when determining both the condition and value of any used acoustic instruments. Also, please study the PGS digital color photographs carefully on pages 17-31 to learn more about the factors described below.

Finish (read that original finish) - Original finish in good shape is, of course, the most desirable, and is the Holy Grail for collectors when hooked up with a major trademark and desirable model. A light professional overspray will negatively affect the value of a guitar somewhat. Professionally refinished instruments are typically worth 50% of the value of an original, and a poor refinish is below that. An exception might be a case where there's only one or two examples of a highly desirable item, and condition may take a back seat to rarity.

Major repairs - Many older guitars have had repairs, of course. A well-done neck reset won't affect the overall value that much. Replaced bridges will have an affect, but the better the work, the better the resale value. A replaced neck, fingerboard, part of a side, top or back will cause the price to drop noticeably. Again, if it's an especially rare item, the rarity factor might negate the major repair(s).

Modifications - Any non-factory modification on an original guitar is going to hurt the value. Deciding to refinish the top of your pre-war D-45 Martin for example, will cost you the price of refinishing, plus another \$25,000+ for non-originality! Less visible but still important are altered bracing, shaved necks, and repaired/replaced/shaved bridges. Think really really hard before you make any of these changes on vintage guitars. On current acoustic instruments, playing modifications may add to an instrument's value on occasion. Remember, you won't get a second chance to make it original.

Replacement Tuners and other non-original parts - Many older guitars have been fitted with new tuners at some point. These days, there are good replacement tuners available that fit the original holes, etc. There are also sleeves that will make an oversized hole into the correct size for original style tuners. Even a good, appropriate replacement set will have a negative affect on value, even though it constitutes a playing improvement over what was available when the instrument was manufactured.

Cracks - Acoustic instruments are overall more susceptible to cracking than electric guitars. This is because the bodies are typically not solid, and the thinner wood may crack due to humidity and/or temperature variations. Many older pre-WWII acoustic guitars have a cracked top. The seriousness of

the crack and/or how professionally it has been repaired make all the difference in determining both playability and value. Unfortunately, unattended cracks tend to get bigger and usually do not go back together perfectly. Any crack will affect value, but a small, professionally well repaired crack will take much less of a bite out of the price than a large gaping crack that wouldn't go together properly.

Frets - A good analogy for frets would be found in the vintage car market: you rarely find a vintage car with original tires. Guitars were made to be played and frets do wear out. A good professional fret job using factory spec parts should not affect the value of your instrument. Again, this question won't come up with a mint, unplayed guitar.

Cosmetics - The cleaner an instrument, the more it's worth. Don't ever underestimate the value of eye appeal. A mint, unplayed, original condition guitar with tags will always bring more than the prices for "excellent" condition. On the other hand, an instrument with most of the finish worn off from years of use, but is unaltered with no problems is still more desirable than an instrument with higher condition but with a cracked top, replaced bridge, shaved neck, etc.

General Guitar Maintenance & Tips - Airplanes are meant to be flown, cars are meant to be driven, and guitars are meant to be played. Since instrument construction is typically wood, and wood expands/contracts like many other natural materials, don't allow instruments to go from one extreme temp/humidity factor to another (i.e., don't ship your Stromberg Master 400 from Ft. Meyers, FL to Frostbite Falls, MN in January). Try to maintain a stable temp. and humidity level. Also, use good quality, professional products to clean, polish, and maintain (Virtuoso is recommended) your instrument (investment). Remember, maintaining a fine guitar requires some common sense and TLC.

Guitars, even vintage ones, are meant to be played. Enjoy yours, take proper care of it, play it once in awhile, and don't let temperature and/or humidity factors get to extremes.