

UNDERSTANDING CONDITION FACTORS

Rating the condition factor of a guitar is, at best, subjective, while at worst, totally misrepresentative. We've given a few examples of things that may affect the value 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 Photo Grading System color photographs carefully on pages 25-40 to learn more about the factors described below.

Finish - Original finish in good shape is, of course, the most desirable, and is typically the most important factor 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 50-60% of the value of an original, and a poor refinish is below that. A guitar with original finish in average condition is often worth more than a guitar that is refinished in excellent condition.

Major Repairs - Many older acoustic guitars have had repairs, which are expected. A well-done neck reset won't affect the overall value that much. Replaced bridges will have an effect, 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. Items that are less visible, but still important include altered bracing, shaved necks, and repaired/replaced/shaved bridges. Repair work at an authorized facility for certain trademarks/manufacturers is the best way to ensure work is done properly and the most value is maintained.

Modifications - Any non-factory modification on an original guitar is going to hurt the value. Electronics are the most common addition to acoustic guitars, and as long as no holes have to be drilled, this modification can actually add value. Think really hard before you make any of these changes on vintage guitars - remember, you don'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 effect on value, even though it constitutes a playing improvement over what was available when the instrument was manufactured. Replacement parts that are as close to the original pieces will have the least negative effect on the value.

Cracks - Acoustic instruments susceptible to cracking 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/String - A good analogy for frets and strings would be found in the vintage car market: you rarely find a vintage car with original tires. Guitars were meant to be played and frets and strings do wear out. A good professional fret job using factory spec parts should not affect the value of your instrument. Also, strings are meant to be changed, so don't get too wound up if these two items are not original.

Cosmetics - The cleaner an instrument, the more its 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 International Falls, MN in January). Try to maintain a stable temp. and humidity level. Also, use good quality, professional products to clean, polish, and maintain 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.