

MARTIN GPCPA1 £3,199  
ELECTRO-ACOUSTICS



PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOBY SESSIONS



Guitarist  
**CHOICE**

# Martin GPCPA1 £3,199

Two for one! A new Martin body design, plus a first look at Fishman's latest mic-imaging system *by Jim Chapman*

**A**lthough Martin introduced a 17-inch-wide Grand Jumbo last year, it's rare for the company to launch new body shapes. It therefore makes it all the more newsworthy that it has debuted the Grand Performance design, one of three cutaway electros in a new Performing Artist Series, the first Martins to incorporate Fishman's new F1 Aura mic-imaging blender system.

At just under 16 inches across the lower bouts, the GPCPA1 is generically a grand auditorium, and it's no accident that its Venetian-cutaway body profile bears more than a passing resemblance to arch-rival Taylor's own GA design, the closest model price-wise being the spruce/rosewood 814CE. The Martin employs similar timbers, allied to a cosmetic treatment befitting its £3,000-plus price tag. The top, with abalone rosette and pointy tortie pickguard, has multi-purpled ovankol binding, also used as a single ply for the back's binding and centre strip. Ovankol edges the ebony fingerboard too and continues around the spade peghead, carrying a striped ebony overlay and Martin's vertical-style logo. The fretboard sports 'arrows-and-squares' position markers, which convey a similar aesthetic to Taylor's 814 markers from a distance.

The GPCPA1's bridge is a new design. It's slimmer than Martin's standard belly variety, and the rear face is fashioned to a gently winged profile. The bridge pin spacing has been widened, supposedly to offer better hand-resting comfort, and the pins themselves are aligned parallel to the saddle, to provide more consistent downward pressure onto the undersaddle pickup.

Aside from narrow wings making up the full width of the headstock, the guitar's mahogany neck is one piece, attached by Martin's widely used bolt-assisted mortise-and-tenon joint. Kicking off at a picker-friendly 44.5mm across the nut, it has a slightly slimmer taper further up than usual, allowing for more comfortable high-position work. One possible consequence is that the top E's string path runs fairly close to the edge of the 'board, and this writer experienced the occasional fret-end slipover when doing capo'd hammer-ons and pull-offs. It pays to be precise in one's technique. In other respects the 'C'-profile neck is a joy to handle, with a shallow, virtually constant depth, slick satin finish and a moderate fingerboard radius.

Fishman's F1 Aura is quite a feat of ingenuity. Offering more facilities and sounds than the

Onboard Aura, it nevertheless manages to pack these into an interface of just two knobs and an LED display. Here's a snapshot of what's on offer: nine digitally processed mic images (see Guide to... below) recorded acoustically using another GPCPA1; independent three-band EQs for the undersaddle and image sources; pickup/image blend of course;

## The Rivals

Unsurprisingly top of the list is **Taylor's 814CE** grand auditorium (£3,259), which incorporates the multi-body-transducer, two-band Expression System.

**Yamaha's** handcrafted **LJX26CSRT** small jumbo (£3,575) carries the new SRT blender preamp including six mic images and five-filter anti-feedback. **Baden's A-Style Rosewood Ellipse Aura** (£1,549) offers four blendable images, anti-feedback, phase and bass boost. All three are spruce/rosewood with a cutaway.

## Guide to F1 Aura mic images

Here's what you'll find on board...

Image	Microphone	Type
1)	<b>DPA4011</b>	Small diaphragm condenser
2)	<b>Schoeps CMC64g</b>	Small diaphragm condenser
3)	<b>Earthworks QTC30</b>	Omni condenser
4)	<b>AKG C414-B</b>	Omni large diaphragm condenser
5)	<b>Neumann KM84</b>	Small diaphragm condenser
6)	<b>Soundelux E47</b>	Large diaphragm condenser
7)	<b>GT Velo 8</b>	Ribbon
8)	<b>Shure SM57</b>	Dynamic cardioid
9)	<b>Neumann U87</b>	Large diaphragm condenser



The F1 Aura system is elegant for sure. But is it easy to use?

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High-end features all add to the price: will we see a stripped-down model in time?

Acoustically, the GPCPA1 has a smooth and warm tonality, with a nice touch of zing and zap when played vigorously

phase reverse, a variable-level compressor, auto-chromatic tuner and anti-feedback. This last function is not only simpler to operate than on the Onboard Aura, but involves up to three filters working on a seek-and-destroy basis, not just one.

Accessing all this versatility involves a steep-ish learning curve and the 20-page manual will be required reading for most of us. Basically, though, each rotary control doubles as a multi-function push button, enabling the various facilities to be scrolled through then adjusted for value and status. The left knob is the main play-and-edit control, the right is for volume plus push functions covering, for example, image EQ, phase and activating the tuner, which is fast, accurate and handily mutes the system. Setting up anti-feedback requires both knobs to be pressed simultaneously. When adjusting the blend ratios and

the EQs, the segments around the circumference of the display light up as appropriate to indicate less, more or flat. The numerical values are also shown in the centre of the display. In practice, a reasonable level of familiarisation can be achieved fairly quickly, however there are a couple of practical irritations: firstly, if a function is left unedited for more than a few seconds, it switches out and you have to scroll through to find it again; secondly, it's easy to scroll past the function you want, in which case you have to go around again – you can't scroll backwards. Our advice is that you should set up the system as much as you can during the soundcheck, not prod away frantically mid-gig.

### Sounds

Acoustically, the GPCPA1 has a smooth and warm tonality – even a shade dark on our

sample's low E and A strings – with a nice touch of sweet zing and snap when played vigorously. Unplugged volume isn't ostensibly that punchy, though digging in unlocks generous dynamics, so first impressions are deceptive.

Firing up the F1 reveals impressive results. The images' palette of tones and timbres are more varied than this reviewer recalls with the Onboard Aura, they're also much more musical and usable at high image-to-pickup ratios, and having separate EQs is a real boon for fine-tuning the two signal sources.

Compression is subtle in its effect but a great inclusion for super-even strummage, while anti-feedback proves very effective, rarely needing to employ all three filters. Settings for this are stored in memory and can instantly be reactivated to tackle the hot spot(s) that have been identified beforehand. Almost needless to say, the F1's performance as an under-saddle system is excellent too, with a clear, natural voicing.

### Verdict

The mic-imaging blender race is really hotting up. In issue 329 we were impressed by Yamaha's new SRT-powered CPX1200; now Fishman has trumped its own Aura technology with a system that poses a serious riposte to all comers in terms of overall performance flexibility and quality. The big question is: will the F1's multi-layered yet minimalist control interface deter some buyers? Almost certainly. But if you can successfully acclimatise to it, it's a winner, and the same can be said for Martin's new Grand Performance design. **G**

### The Bottom Line

**We like:** Build quality; looks; sonic versatility

**We dislike:** Tight string-path leeway outside top E string; F1's control protocol will scare some away

**Guitarist says:** Strong new design debut for Martin, thanks in no small part to excellent-sounding F1 Aura



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### Martin GPCPA1

**PRICE:** £3,199 (inc case)

**ORIGIN:** USA

**TYPE:** Grand auditorium-size cutaway electro

**TOP:** Solid Sitka spruce

**BACK/SIDES:** Solid rosewood

**MAX RIM DEPTH:** 112mm

**MAX BODY WIDTH:** 401mm

**NECK:** Mahogany

**SCALE LENGTH:** 645mm

**TUNERS:** Gold die-cast

**NUT/WIDTH:** Bone/44.5mm

**FINGERBOARD:** Ovangkol-bound

ebony with 406mm (16-inch) radius

**FRETS:** 20, thin

**BRIDGE/SPACING:** Ebony with Tusq saddle/55mm

**ELECTRICS:** Gold Plus under-saddle

pickup; Fishman F1 Aura blender

preamp with two multi-function

controls plus display, covering

volume, image select (1-9), pickup/

image blend, separate image and

pickup three-band EQ, phase, anti-

feedback, compressor and auto-

chromatic tuner. End-block battery

housing with separate strap button

and jack socket

**WEIGHT (kg/lb):** 2.25/4.95

**OPTIONS:** DCPA1 dreadnought and

OMCPA1 orchestra (£3,199 each) –

both with cutaway and F1 Aura

**LEFT-HANDERS:** To special order, no

extra charge

**FINISH:** Gloss natural body;

satin neck

**Westside Distribution**

**0141 248 4812**

**www.martinguitar.com**

### Test results

**Build quality** ★★★★★

**Playability** ★★★★★

**Sound** ★★★★★

**Value for money** ★★★★★

**GUITARIST RATING** ★★★★★