

LAVA ME4 Carbon Acoustic

LAVA has revolutionised 'Smart Guitars' with its range – allowing musicians to play at home and perform live with an enormous selection of on-board effects and recording facilities, without the need for additional hardware or weighty pedalboards.

Nick Jenni-son takes a look at the brand's latest release, the ME4 Carbon.

GUITAR players are famously slow to embrace change. With the most popular electric designs dating back to the previous century, and acoustics the century before that, folks often decry the lack of innovation in the guitar space. Well, if there's any manufacturer that we can't level that criticism at, it's Lava.

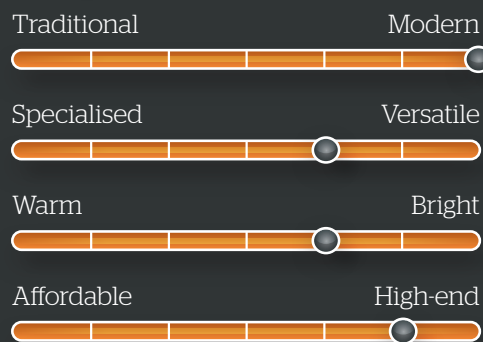
The fourth in their line of carbon-bodied, touch-screen-equipped acoustics, the ME4 is about as far away from a traditional acoustic guitar that it's possible to get and still be able to call it a guitar. It has a neck with frets (and now, a truss rod - a relatively new addition!), six strings, a bridge and a guitar-shaped body with a hole in it. That's where the similarities end. ▶





LAVA ME4 Carbon Acoustic

The Breakdown



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For more information, please visit: jhs.co.uk/collections/lava



*The Lava Me 4 is a very unique and forward-looking guitar that offers a ton of creative tools, and it doesn't make you work for your results - you press a button and you get results *now*.*

The Lava ME4 is made entirely of carbon fibre, making it exceptionally rugged and resistant to temperature changes. It features Plek'd frets (which are excellent) and a 2.3mm factory action, which is advertised as “effortless to press.” I’m not sure I’d agree with that since 2.3mm falls firmly into the “medium-high” end of the action range, but the ME4 is certainly not a chore to play, and the smooth, slim neck feels very comfortable.

These are fairly uninteresting features compared to the star of the show, though - the processing. The ME4 features a touch screen and a SHARC audio chip, which provides everything from effects to backing tracks all the way through to Lava’s own social media network where you can take part in playing challenges, share your improvisations, like and comment on

other people’s playing and much more! The interface will be very familiar to anyone who’s used an iPhone recently - perhaps a bit TOO familiar, but it’s certainly intuitive to use. That’s not to say there aren’t a few design issues that need looking at though - backing tracks and drum loops won’t play in the background, meaning you can’t change effects without stopping your track. You also need to enter a separate menu to adjust the balance between guitar and “media” volume - which also stops the track, so you sort of have to “guess” where the media volume should be set. There are a few other issues too, but these are all UI-related, and the actual functionality is very good. Also, these are only a firmware update away from being fixed - not something you can say about a traditional guitar that won’t stay in tune.

The actual sounds are presented in the form of “effects” - preset patches that are loaded using the touch screen. They all have very cool (if slightly ambiguous and uninformative) names like “Moon Jumper” and “Frog Prince” and exciting graphics. There are a few fairly standard sounds like Reverb and Chorus, but the majority of these effects are WILD. Auto-wah with pitch-shifting delays. Cavern reverbs with square wave tremolo and bit crushing. You get the idea. They’re clearly designed to spark creativity with the minimum of time spent tone-chasing, but I did find myself wanting some more traditional tones to go along with these more outlandish sounds - but then again, I’m an ageing Millennial with several tube amps, too many, so take what I have to say with a pinch of salt.

One of the best features the ME4 has to offer is the suite of learning and practice tools it offers. As well as the metronome, drum loops and easily accessible backing tracks, the ME4 also provides lessons for all ability levels and practice tracking tools to “gamify” your practice sessions. You can even take part in practice challenges and see how you rank on leaderboards of Lava players worldwide.

The Lava Me 4 is a very unique and forward-looking guitar. It offers a ton of creative tools, and it doesn't make you work for your results - you press a button and you get results *now*. It's intuitive to use, and made of very high-quality materials. It's not cheap, but it is a lot of fun, and a great way to get creative with minimal barriers to entry.

