

The Orson Welles**Normandy ATG-CH**

PERHAPS THE MOST STRIKING GUITAR IN THIS cage match, the chromed ATG-CH—touted as the world's first production aluminum arch-top—definitely broadcasts the intentions of its maker, Jim Normandy, to be “different, but not too weird or space age.” To that end, the Salem, Oregon manufacturer obviously relied on vintage designs, adding only some boss-looking “rivets” and a seemingly Russian military grade kill switch as distinctive accoutrements. Despite its metal body, I didn't find the ATG-CH to be a back buster, but, at 9.4 lbs, it's not exactly like hanging balloons around your neck, either. The wide, slim neck felt good in my hands, and nothing impeded my convulsive chording, sledgehammer riffs, or dainty melodic forays. However, the Volume knobs are placed too far out of reach—at least for me—to allow swells while picking. And while I had a blast performing stutters with the kill switch, if you're in a

band with sensitive, singer/songwriter types, they may wince when the rock-solid switch snaps louder than the drummer's snare.

Overall, the U.S.A.-made ATG-CH is well constructed. The chromed finish is dazzling in its “hall of mirrors” majesty (although it spotlights every fingerprint, skin-oil swipe, and sweat splatter), the hardware is locked down solid, and a rounded nut is a considerate touch. However, the fret ends are rough, there were some dings and scratches on the edges of the rosewood fretboard, and the neck pocket is 1/16" larger than the neck on the cutaway side.

One of the first things you notice when strumming the ATG-CH is its loud and clear acoustic sound. The jangle has a pleasant metallic bite that is certainly less aggressive than a resonator's raspy glory, but it sounds marvelous when miked up and used to layer some articulate chime under distorted solidbody tracks. When you plug in, and go to the neck pickup, you get a deep, resonant boom along with a sharp attack that almost sounds as if you layered a Gibson ES-175 and a Fender Telecaster. The combined pickup position tames the boom a bit, and moves the snark forward to produce a taut, throaty snarl. Go for a full-on bridge-pickup tone, and you'll hear a spiky, high-midrange snap with the shimmer of a Nashville-tuned acoustic. The only downside of this metal/wood electronics gumbo is that it's very difficult to dial in a warm, trad-jazz tone, but most other sounds are animated and dimensional. This is why the ATG-CH is the perfect “Orson Welles”—a director who battled convention, and thrilled cineastes with his multi-faceted visual smorgasbords.

—Michael Molenda

SPECS

Normandy Guitars,

(503) 689-1998; normandyguitars.com

MODEL	ATG-CH
PRICE	\$3,199 retail/\$2,399 street
NUT WIDTH	1 11/16"
NECK	Maple, bolt-on
FRETBOARD	25.5"-scale rosewood
FRETS	22 medium jumbo
BODY	Aircraft-grade aluminum
PICKUPS	Normandy Old School humbuckers
CONTROLS	Two Volume, one Tone, 3-way pickup selector, kill switch
BRIDGE	Locking roller with Bigsby-licensed B70 tremolo
TUNERS	Gotoh
FACTORY STRINGS	Ernie Ball Slinky, .011 set
WEIGHT	9.4 lbs
KUDOS	Almost cinematic tonal spectrum. Unique finish. Plays well.
CONCERNS	Super-reflective surface can beam stage lights into your eyes—or the audience's. Minor construction issues.

