

Normandy guitar

By K. Williams Brown

Statesman Journal

August 2, 2008

Normandy Guitars are made at Zephyr Engineering in South Salem. When they're not making the world's first aluminum production archtop, Zephyr cranks out aircraft parts, wood-burning stoves, truck bumpers and more.

The body is cut from sheets of aluminum on a laser cutter. The laser cutter itself is about the size of a garden shed and the entire process is computer-run.

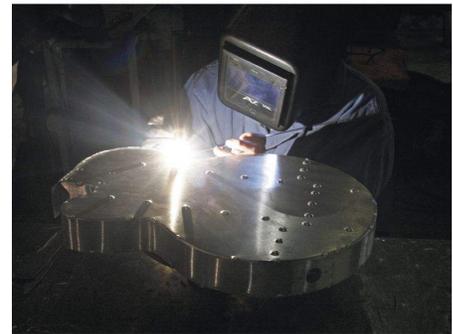
"It's pretty much the same," said laser operator Richard Thompson, when asked how the process differs from laser-cutting of bumpers or stoves. "These have a lot more holes; it takes a lot longer."

Jim Normandy started off making aluminum basses — he's a bass player — before he decided the guitar market may be more lucrative. He is now developing a bass along with a V-shaped guitar. He made 15 prototypes before landing on the current design. The bodies are fully welded at Zephyr Engineering before being sent off for their color treatment and neck attachment.

The welding process takes about an hour and there are 12 rivets in each guitar. They're not architecturally necessary, Normandy said, but rather part of the distinctive metalness of the guitars.

All of his finishes are inspired by iconic metal looks — his yellow guitar uses the exact same shade as school buses. His army-flack guitar recreated a Hummer and his candy-apple metal flake is the same hue "you'd see on low-riders or on a '70s boat," he said. He also offers a triple-plated chrome. The finishes are done off-site, in Tualatin and Aumsville.

The guitars themselves are made of mostly recycled aluminum, which, Normandy said, is a nice eco-friendly touch.



TIMOTHY J. GONZALEZ | Statesman Journal

Kari Konchalski welds the seams of one of Jim Normandy's arch top aluminum guitars at Zephyr Engineering on Wednesday July 30, 2008.