

OZARK

5-STRING BANJO

REVIEW – 2141G/2110G

British banjo virtuoso Leon Hunt gets to grips with two offerings from Ozark. Do they come up to the mark?



For as long as I can remember, Ozark have been one of the – if not the – most prominent brands in the entry level/intermediate section of the UK banjo marketplace. Although I've never actually owned an Ozark myself, as a banjo teacher I've tuned, changed strings, corrected the intonation and generally tinkered with dozens of them!

The two banjos up for review here are what I would describe as intermediate instruments, and are among the highest quality Ozark produce. While they are both 5-stringed models, they're very different in construction, tone and intended use. The 2141G is very much a Mastertone-style bluegrass banjo, while the 2110G is an open-backed (no resonator) banjo, more suited to clawhammer or frailing styles found in music such as old-time.

2141G

Build Quality

I'll start with the 2141G. This is essentially a good-quality, Chinese-made Mastertone-style banjo. There are currently dozens of these on the market, all branded differently, but essentially very similar in design and build, and in all probability manufactured in the same factories to the brand's own cosmetic specifications. This

being the case, the main things that would set one of this breed of instruments apart from another are how much care has been taken with the assembly and set-up of the many components that go together to make a banjo, and all of the cosmetic elements such as wood, colouring, plating and inlay designs. This is where the 2141G scores well.

Ozark, and their parent company, Stentor Music, have a reputation for well-put-together instruments (at a cost) and this banjo preserves this reputation admirably. There are a couple of minor fret buzzes, but nothing that couldn't easily be dialled out with some careful truss rod

The rich, chocolatey finish to the maple neck and resonator is particularly nice. All too often you find gaudy sunbursts on this type of instrument.

adjustment. Buzzes aside, the banjo plays well, with a fairly nice neck profile, a little on the chunky side perhaps, but comfortable nevertheless.

Aesthetically, the 2141G has an attractive, classic look. The inlay design works very well, although the pearl is typically thin, resulting in a fairly flat,

two-dimensional effect. The rich, chocolatey finish to the maple neck and resonator is also particularly nice. All too often you find gaudy sunbursts on this type of instrument. Not so here. The only real visual let-down is the metalwork. The plating is chrome, as opposed to the more conventional nickel. Nickel has a







Technical specification

Manufacturer: Ozark
Model: 2141G High quality 5 string banjo
Retail Price: £570
Made In: China
Back and Sides: Flamed maple resonator with inlaid rings
Neck: Solid maple
Fingerboard: Rosewood
Frets: 22
Tuners: Chrome plated high quality
Nut Width: 31.5mm
Scale Length: 670mm
Onboard Electronics: N/A
Left Handers: N/A
Extra info:
Head: 11" REMO Weatherking
 24 tension brackets
 Double co-ordinator rods
 Cast tone ring

Contact details

Stentor Music Co Ltd
 Tel: 01 737 240226
 www.ozark-acoustic.com

What we think

Pros: Well-put-together, classic-looking, nice-sounding banjo at a fantastic price.

Cons: Badly fitting case, chrome plating and slightly dodgy engraving on the armrest.

Overall: A decent instrument for the improving player marred by a few small points, but great value for money.

Our Ratings Explained

5 Stars: Superb, Almost faultless.
4 Stars: Excellent, Hard to beat.
3 Stars: Good, covers all bases well.
2 or 1 Stars: Below average, poor.

Rating out of five

BUILD QUALITY 
SOUND QUALITY 
VALUE FOR MONEY 

far warmer, high-quality look to it. This banjo certainly warrants the extra couple of quid that it would have cost to have nickel plating. One final gripe would be the engraving on the armrest. While the design is fine, it does look fairly cheap and nasty – but this is coming from someone who's not terribly keen on expensive, high-quality engraving either.

Sounds

Tonally, the 2141G performs equally well. It's equipped with a good-quality rock maple rim and a serviceable Mastertone-style tone ring. The ring is most likely made from some kind of zinc alloy, often described as 'pot metal'. Its sonic characteristics are typical of banjos in this price bracket, possessing a kind of hyped 'fizzy' quality that I actually quite like. You don't tend to find these elements in more expensive instruments. While it doesn't have the pure sonic detail of a higher-, professional-quality banjo, fitted with the benchmark bell bronze tone ring and higher-grade materials all round, the sound is certainly full-bodied and pleasing, with bags of sustain – maybe even a little too much for the purists! Overall, the 2141G's sound is easily as good as any of its competition and better than most.

2110G

Build and Features

The 2110G is an altogether different type of instrument. It's a



walnut, open-backed banjo based around the Whyte Laydie-style tone ring. The combination of the open back and the different ring makes for a pleasing and comparatively gentle 'plonky' tone, more suited to clawhammer or frailing styles of playing, or even a singer-songwriter looking for an alternative to their guitar

for accompaniment.

Despite the inlay design being very conservative, at least by banjo standards, the instrument as a whole is actually fairly striking in appearance. This is largely due to the headstock being tastefully sculpted to reveal its four laminations, something I've never seen on a banjo headstock





The open back and Whyte Laydie-style ring makes this suited to clawhammer style

before. The banjo also has an old-style Remo Renaissance head (skin). I really like the look of these things and have a feeling this could be another contributing factor to the banjo's smooth tone. Sadly, as was the case with the 2141G, we're in chrome central again. It seems like a minor thing, but some

good-quality nickel plating would make all the difference, and at the risk of repeating myself further, it also has the same engraved, tinny armrest as the 2141G. This particular gripe is exacerbated by yet more engraving on the stretcher band.

Playability

This instrument plays really well straight out of the case. No buzzes or rattles, and a slightly nicer neck profile than that of the 2141G. The geared tuners, while not being as smooth as higher-quality 'branded' units, are fairly direct. My only fear would be with longevity. In my experience, this type of tuner has a tendency to become a little vague after a while. I really like the satin finish which, aside from the visual implications, has the added bonus of being less sticky on the hand when running up and down the fingerboard.

A final thing worthy of a mention is the good-quality and well-fitted case that comes as standard with the 2110G. While I wouldn't like to hand it over to Ireland's 'favourite' budget airline, it is easily good enough to protect your investment from most other things it might encounter. Sadly, while the 2141G comes with a similar case, it's nowhere nearly as well fitted to the banjo.

Conclusion

Both of these banjos are very capable instruments, representing exceptional value for money. There are one or two things that let them down cosmetically, but on the whole you'd be really hard-pushed to do better in this price bracket. I don't currently own an open-backed banjo but I'm sorely tempted by the 2110G.

Leon Hunt



OZARK

2110G

www.acousticmagazine.com for reviews



Technical specification

Manufacturer: Ozark
Model: 2110G 5 string open back banjo
Retail Price: £555
Made In: China
Back and Sides: Laminated walnut shell
Neck: Solid walnut
Fingerboard: Rosewood with inlays
Frets: 22
Tuners: Chrome plated high quality
Nut Width: 31.5
Scale Length: 670
Onboard Electronics: N/A
Left Handers: N/A
Extra info:
Head: 11" REMO
 24 tension brackets
 Double co-ordinator rods
 'Whyte Laydie' style tone ring

Contact details

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What we think

Pros: Solid construction, good sounds, excellent case.
Cons: That chrome plating and dodgy engraving again.
Overall: An all-round good instrument, at a wonderful price, that could work well for singer-songwriters.

Our Ratings Explained

5 Stars: Superb, Almost faultless.
4 Stars: Excellent, Hard to beat.
3 Stars: Good, covers all bases well.
2 or 1 Stars: Below average, poor.

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