



The Johnny Depp Collings I-35 Deluxe

THERE'S NO MISTAKING YOU'RE LOOKING AT A luxury item when you scan the I-35's stunning quilted-maple top finished in a high-gloss root beer hue—not to mention the beautifully retro ivoroid control knobs, the gold hardware, the ivoroid binding, and the mother-of-pearl Collings logo. The basic retail price for the I-35 is \$5,800, but these additions launched the review model's price tag to \$6,575: premium quilt top (\$200), parallelogram inlays (\$150), gold hardware (\$125), black/white purfing (\$100), hardshell case (\$200). For many working guitarists, the I-35 will be relegated to the land of dreams. But what a dream it is.

The U.S.A.-made I-35 is a magnificent example of guitar making. To find any construction or finish flaws, I think you'd need an atomic microscope, because the naked eye will see nothing but perfection from heel to headstock. I even did former *GP* editor Andy Ellis' trick of sneaking a small mirror through the f-holes to expose any rough innards, but everything appeared to be as neat and clean as a surgeon's instrument tray. The quality control is so off-the-map that lugging the I-35 to a club gig struck me as little different than toting a Rembrandt to a kindergarten fingerpainting class. And yet, if this beauty can't be a beast on stage, then, as far as I'm concerned, it's more of an investment than an instrument.

From a playability standpoint, the I-35 continues to be achingly seductive. Its wide, vintage-style neck and superbly dressed frets are so inviting that your technique improves about 20 percent simply by placing your fingers on the fretboard. It's a magical experience. I thought the ivoroid knobs might be slippery, but the material grips your pinky tightly, and

the pots turn with exceptional smoothness. The pickup-selector switch is positioned for easy, on-the-fly manipulation—although wild strummers might hit it by accident.

While I was a bit embarrassed subjecting the I-35 to punk rock, it was more than game to rage. There's a hint of sophistication in every tone—a smooth sheen to the highs, midrange frequencies akin to polished steel, and tight lows—but when I cranked the gain, the I-35 responded with all the snot and grit you'd expect from more obviously rock-oriented axes. However, you also get the versatility to dial in stout and resonant jazz timbres, open-sounding acoustic-like tones, and clean and funky pops and snaps. I tagged the I-35 as “Johnny Depp” because he's a striking movie star who can carry Hollywood blockbusters, and still be believable in dark indie films. The I-35 can do it all, as well, but, like a box-office champ, it'll cost you big time for the privilege of its partnership. —*Michael Molenda*

SPECS |

Collings, (512) 288-7776; collingsguitars.com

MODEL	I-35 Deluxe
PRICE	\$6,575 retail, as tested/ Street price N/A
NUT WIDTH	1 11/16"
NECK	Mahogany, set
FRETBOARD	24 7/8"-scale Brazilian or Madagascar rosewood
FRETS	22 medium-wide
BODY	Honduran mahogany with fully carved, solid flamed-maple top
PICKUPS	Jason Lollar custom humbuckers
CONTROLS	Two Volume, two Tone, 3-way pickup selector
BRIDGE	TonePros
TUNERS	Sperzel
FACTORY STRINGS	D'Addario EXL115
WEIGHT	6.7 lbs
KUDOS	Dazzling looks. Fabulous playability. Stunning tones.
CONCERNS	Only that 90 percent of us can't afford it.