

## Super Semi-Hollow

### The Collings SoCo Deluxe

**W**HETHER YOU'RE A fan of the flat-top or simply appreciate a good archtop, chances are you're familiar with Collings Guitars. The Texas-based builder is one of the most recognized and respected names amongst aficionados of modern acoustic instruments.

Bill Collings and his crew – renowned for their flat-tops, archtops, mandolins, and even cowboy guitars – recently turned their attention to the electric-guitar market with a line of instruments named after roads in and around Austin, including the solidbody carved-top City Limits (CL), hollowbody CL Jazz series, slab solidbody 290 (their shop is located on Highway 290), semi-hollow double-cutaway I-35, and our subject, the new semi-hollow single-cutaway SoCo (named after South Congress Avenue).

The SoCo's spec sheet includes a long list of high-end features, like a carved flame-maple top, semi-hollow mahogany body with a carved back, set mahogany neck with bound Brazilian rosewood fretboard, optional dual-parallel-mother-of-pearl inlays (dots are standard), Tone Pros tune-o-matic-style bridge/stop tailpiece, Jason Lollar humbuckers, high-gloss nitrocellulose-lacquer finish, and grained ivoroid touches on the binding, pickup ring,

knobs, truss rod cover, and tuner buttons.

The SoCo makes a brilliant first impression with its gorgeous carved flame-maple top and perfectly executed soft amber-sunburst finish. Once you can gaze beyond the intoxicating flame top, though, you start to appreciate the many fine touches here; the nicely cut and finished bone nut, polished frets. And while the top might be the star of the show, the rest of the tone woods do not take a back

seat. The one-piece carved mahogany back, the Brazilian fretboard, and the headstock overlay are also gorgeous, with a beautiful contrasting grain pattern and deep, rich color.

The grained ivoroid binding and parts give the SoCo a cohesive look and vintage vibe. And while the list of standard features is long, Collings does offer a few upgrades including gold hardware, deluxe flared headstock, black/white top purfling, as well as a quilted maple top (instead of flame).

From a playability standpoint, the slim-taper neck profile, polished frets, soft lacquer finish, and pro setup make the SoCo more than comfortable – it's simply hard to put down! The contoured neck heel allows good access to the upper frets, while a longer

(24<sup>7/8</sup>" scale length gives the guitar perfect tension and resistance. The pickup selector is mounted on the upper bout, while individual pickup volume and tone controls are positioned in the traditional position on the lower treble bout.

Plugged into a VVT Lindy Fralin signature combo (12AX7/6V6), the SoCo produced great tones; the bridge pickup offered a bright, articulate sound that was still full and round, with punchy low-end and no harsh high-midrange overtones. Used in combination, the bridge and neck pickups produced the guitar's most complex tone, with thick, lush midrange and slightly jangly highs. The neck pickup performed very well solo; with its well-tapered and voiced Tone control rolled back a bit, it mellowed out offering a dark, thick, expressive sound with the round midrange "pop" you expect from a hollowbody. The combination of the Brazilian rosewood fretboard, maple top, and the Lollar pickups give the SoCo a lively, complex tone.

Through a 65Amps SoHo (EF86/12AX7/EL84) with a single 15" Alnico speaker, the SoCo continues its lively, dynamic performance. The amplifier's preamp teamed with the SoCo to make a variety of rich tones, from crunchy overdrive to smooth jazz. Even when driven to higher gain, feedback was never an issue, and low-end stayed surprisingly firm for a semi-hollow guitar.

The Collings SoCo is an impressive instrument that literally left us with absolutely no nits to pick; it's a top-notch piece that serves as a worthy end-product of fine tone woods, electronics, and workmanship. – *Phil Feser*



#### **COLLINGS SOCO DELUXE**

Price: \$6,000 (base), \$6150 as reviewed.

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