

First Impression
A beauty,
built on the J
template with
a modern
vibe
First Impression



Hailing from Rio de Janeiro, D'Alegria use unique pickups and exotic materials to make custom basses and guitars that stand out from the crowd. Review by Gareth Morgan

D'Alegria

Defender JB Deluxe Bass

D'Alegria is a Brazilian company founded in 2003 by Daniel Alegria and Rodrigo Werneck. Alegria and Werneck produce high-quality, totally handmade basses and guitars; the pair personally manufacture, test and quality control each instrument and use certified non-endangered Brazilian woods, many of which are completely unfamiliar to European consumers. As always with custom instruments, each template can be personalised in terms of hardware, pickups, electronics and choice of timber.

We've managed to get our hands on the fully spec'd Defender JB Deluxe. While D'Alegria uses the Jazz Bass as their starting point, they fall short of simply replicating the body shape: the fatter upper horn and smoother, more obviously triangular lower brother with deeper cutaway modernises the concept nicely, and allows easier access to the highest fret. There's a high standard of craftsmanship and quality on show: just look at the superb evenness of the Defender's bevelled edges.

Two different South American woods make up the body: two pieces of freijo, a wood from the lower Amazon region, comprise the core, while the top veneer is pau marfim - a wood often used as a substitute for maple. Flipping it over reveals the freijo's striped grain pattern plus a forearm chamfer, an electronics housing cover and a handy quick-release battery compartment.

To affix the 34" scale neck D'Alegria chooses the traditional four-bolt system but eschews the usual housing plate. The



The elegant headstock is faced in maple-alike pau marfim. Note the unusual provision of a zero fret



The neck's not maple, but a wood called tauari. Rear sunburst is a cool touch, as are the Hipshot UltraLites

D'Alegria use non-endangered Brazilian woods, and each bass can be customised for pickups, electronics and timbers

neck itself is about as slim and fast as you're ever likely to find. It's hewn from a single piece of tauari, also known as Brazilian oak, with a pau marfim veneer on a headstock with a contemporary square profile with an arrowhead vibe. Four black Hipshot UltraLite tuners work in conjunction with a chrome string tree below; the nut is bone and, unusually for a bass, there's a zero fret just in front to aid setup and intonation. The fingerboard is garapa (Brazilian ash) with white

mother of pearl position dots on its face and smaller black ones on the top edge. Down at the bottom end, the strings are anchored by a Hipshot Type B bridge.

The Defender is loaded with a pair of D'Alegria's own handwound ToneChaser TC-HBP pickups inside cases made from jatoba (also known as Brazilian cherry, although it's completely unrelated to the cherry tree). The pickups are hitched to a ToneChaser TC-3B preamp and a dizzying array of controls: the smaller black

FACTFILE

DEFENDER JB DELUXE

Description: Solidbody bass. Handmade in Brazil

Price: £2517.44

Build: Two-piece freijo body with pau marfim veneer. Bolt-on tauari neck with 24 medium-gauge nickel frets on a garapa fingerboard. Hipshot UltraLite tuners and Hipshot Type B bridge. Black hardware

Electrics: Active with two ToneChaser TC-HBP pickups and ToneChaser TC-3B preamp. Master Volume (pull for passive mode), Blend, Bass, Mid, Treble and Vintagizer controls and two mini toggle coil tap switches

Left hander: Yes, to order

Finishes: Natural, sunburst or metallic

Range Options: Defender JB £1823.16, JB 5-string £1927.37, JB Deluxe 5-string £2621.65

Scale length: 864mm/34"

Width of neck:

Nut 38mm

12th fret 54mm

Depth of neck:

First fret 20mm

12th fret 19mm

String spacing:

Nut 10mm

Bridge 19.5mm

Action as supplied:

12th fret treble 2mm

12th fret bass 3mm

Weight: 3.95kg/8.7lb

Contact: Woodview Enterprises

01236 824588

www.woodviewenterprises.com

THE COMPETITION

SADOWSKY
MV4

Hand-built quality from Sadowsky's Japanese factory
RRP: £1395

SANDBERG
California PM

An unbelievable price for a classy, mainly handbuilt bass from Germany
RRP: £999

BLADE

B2-RG Tetra Classic Bass
Handbuilt in Japan, a cool, uncomplicated Jazz-style update from the Swiss masters
RRP: £1089

knobs are a three-band EQ and the larger ones number Volume (pull for passive mode), Blend, and Vintagizer. This latter control changes the capacitive load associated with the pickups, giving you a selection of starting points from bright and clean to a muddier retro sound.

There's also a three-position coil tap switch for each pickup, down being single-coil, centre being humbucking/parallel (giving more treble) and up being humbucking/series (hum-cancelling).

The important thing to remember is that if you like the D'Alegria design vibe, there are other options in terms of woods, electronics and hardware, all of which you can check out on their website.

SOUNDS

Simply tweaking the Defender's coil tap switches and the Vintagizer uncovers a myriad of options. Turn the Vintagizer towards the neck, and the D'Alegria sounds progressively darker and low-mid biased - great for blues and smooth straight-eighths rock grooves. The coil-taps give a plethora of further options: flick both up for a earthy P-Bassisms, or leave them in the central position for a touch more zing. Our favourite setting is with toggle switches down and the Vintagizer on the bridge notch, so we're focusing on that setting from here.

The twin pickup/flat EQ tone is crisp and crunchy with excellent width and clarity in lower registers. There's plenty



The bridge is a Hipshot, while the pickups are D'Alegria's very own ToneChasers inside real wood covers

This is an exceptional instrument that oozes class from every pore. Upwards of £2000 is a lot of money; it's worth it

of harmonic life up top and a slight high-mid sheen which adds gloss to thinner strings. The soloed neck pickup is growling and earthy with a wicked snarl and open, natural highs; the bridge pickup is equally pleasing, with plenty of burpy, high-mids for fingerstyle funk and bags of width.

Cranking up Bass EQ is a joy on each pickup setting, inducing a superb combination of silky sheen and clarity in twin mode - perfect when you need a well-defined tone with no interference from fixtures and fittings. It's also fairly seismic, as is the neck setting, but here the acoustic qualities ignite a crushing retro-rock sound. Doing the same with the bridge pickup dulls the nasal edge a little, adding girth to the funky definition.

Boosting Middle on this setting is akin to spending 12 rounds with Joe Calzaghe, and smoother funk is easily found by backing it off. Boosting Middle on the remaining settings tightens up the overall sound, accentuating the snarling aggression and lending a pleasing edginess to the neck mode, with more harmonics but a slightly metallic cutting edge on the twin setting that might just be a boost too far. Treble EQ adds lustre to each pickup variation, bringing out the

high mid bias of the twin option but without ruining the sound. There's extra rasp and clarity from the neck and increased snap from the bridge pickup with the improvement in audible tonal detail on both being especially satisfying. Slappers amongst you may crave a little more natural openness when popping the G string, but this is a minor gripe.

VERDICT

This is an exceptional instrument that oozes class from every pore. Upwards of £2000 is a lot of money; in this case it's worth it. Personally, I'd ditch the coil taps and the Vintagizer and go for a purer JB, but personal choice is the beauty of a custom bass - and D'Alegria make fundamentally beautiful instruments.

FINAL SCORE

Build Quality	18/20
Playability	19/20
Sound	19/20
Value for money	18/20
Vibe	18/20
TOTAL	92%

Good for... A wide variety of high-quality sounds on any gig, anywhere
Look elsewhere... For the strictly retro vibe or if you simply can't afford that second mortgage

The body is made of freijo, sometimes known as jennywood or bois de rose

