

Ovation Custom Balladeer circa 1973 Repair by Steve Clark.

Model 1112-1 Sunburst, Serial number 020413.

Forgive me purists, I realize Ovation might be anathema to some luthiers. You have my permission to stop reading.



I'll try to give you the short version of this guitar's crude repair and my plans to improve it. I bought this new in 1973 or soon after at The Music Center in Huron, South Dakota. This was my main guitar until 1995 when I realized I could own more than one guitar. Just kidding. In the '80s I picked up a Sigma classical guitar and an Ovation 12 string, too.

I was part of "the band" for an Iowa State Swing Choir. In 1977 our group flew out of Iowa on a spring break tour and I checked this guitar on one leg of the trip and picked up a crack on the back of the head – apparently due to rough handling and aggravated by my failure to loosen the strings. The guitar otherwise seemed intact and I continued to use it normally. Got married. Moved to San Antonio. Had child. Acquired dog.

The Ovation case is designed to stand on end. While loading our mini-van I had the guitar in case and standing on end when the dog chose to stand up against the case. Case went down falling top face forward which provided optimum physics for propagating the cracked finish all the way through the wood. The break did not sever completely but it was close.



It never occurred to me to seek out a luthier that might have affected a nearly invisible repair. Instead I repaired it myself and you can see the result. The outcome was a fully functional guitar with an ugly head. The screws are the obvious part of the repair but I also used common wood glue.



This guitar has been hiding in a closet in South Dakota since 2012 but I recently retrieved it and after attending Chet's repair workshops I feel like this guitar presents an opportunity to improve the repair. I feel confident I can at least replace the brass machine screws with dowels but also redo the finish to make the crack invisible. Some of the wood on the front face splintered off so it won't easily be possible to hide the break completely and the dowels will be flush but apparent. A perfect restoration isn't my goal – getting rid of the screws and learning how to refinish the repair locally are my aims.

I also learned something about guitar hydration with this guitar. After years of neglect the top was warped – I'll say "dramatically", from string tension at the bridge. The guitar was playable for practicing but it suffered with intonation issues and poor action. I switched the strings from medium to light gauge which helped. Since 2012 I would visit this guitar in South Dakota 2 or 3 times a year. After each visit I would saturate an ordinary sponge then put it loosely in a plastic shopping bag inside the guitar body. After a few months in the case I'd come back to find a dried-out sponge. After about 5 years of this the warpage has reduced and I believe the guitar action and intonation have improved to the point where I could play this guitar out – it might do well for the open mics which have not been kind to my Taylor in the dings department.

So, I have a 47-year-old guitar. I wrote my first songs on it. I got up in front of audiences for some of my first performances. I don't think I can ever sell it. But I can still use it to learn. I hope to have results of my repair efforts sometime after the holidays.