Acoustic Pickup Installations

Current Models of the Carlos Juan VIP Pickup systems

VIP-D (Dual channel TRS Jack) $500
This is a dual signal system with two independent channels. The primary signal is the under saddle coaxial pickup and the secondary system is the CS sensor sound board pickup. There are two soundhole controls that adjust the volume of each pickup independently. The internal preamp can be setup for any combination of tip and ring order of the signals. The typical setup is the primary coaxial signal on the tip and the sensor on the ring. However, it can be reversed on request.

VIP-D (Mono output TS Jack) $500
This is a similar system to the VIP-D except the output is a mono signal of the blended coaxial and sensor pickups. There are two soundhole controls. The first adjusts the sensor's level in the blend and the second adjusts the overall level of the blend. There is no isolated level control for the coaxial.

VIP-M (Mono output TS Jack) $500
This is a dual pickup system with a mono output. The primary source is the under saddle coaxial transducer and the secondary signal is an internal microphone. The microphone is mounted on the internal preamp/output jack. There are three soundhole controls that adjust the internal microphone level, the tone and the overall blended signal volume.

Custom Systems

VIP-M with a passive CS Sensor (Dual Channel TRS Jack) $600
This is the "A best of both worlds" configuration. The coaxial and internal microphone blend is on channel one (tip) and the passive sensor is on channel two (ring). There are three sound hole controls that are identical the standard VIP-M model. There are no controls for the sensor. The sensor signal is passive and the output must be run through an external preamp to get the fullest sound, proper EQ and gain adjustments. One option is running the sensor signal through a Carlos Mini EQ which provides gain and a 5 band graphic EQ. Another option would be running the dual signal through a Grace Design's FELiX preamp. This system must be custom order and can take 1-2 weeks for delivery to the shop.

CP-1 (High End) Inquire for price
The CP-1 is a high end system with an internal preamp inside a small wooden box. The internal preamp has a Bass, Middle, Treble and Level control built in. These systems can be ordered with a passive CS sensor or a sound hole mounted microphone on a second channel (TRS ring). These custom systems are made to order and can take up 4 weeks for delivery to the shop.

The difference between the VIP-D/CS Sensor VIP-M Internal Microphone

The CS sensor attaches to the top of the guitar internally. Placement is typically behind the treble side of the bridge. However, some guitars do well with other placements. In some cases the bracing of the guitar will dictate where the sensor is placed. The sound of the sensor is typically not useable on its own. The CS sensor shines when blended with a primary signal like the under saddle coaxial or an external condenser microphone. I like to describe the sound of the sensor as the "Woodiness" of a guitar's sound. However, since the CS sensor is attached to the soundboard of the guitar, the sound of the sensor tends to be strong with low and mid range frequencies. To add clarity to the sound of the sensor signal I find it is best used with a HPF (High Pass Filter) applied somewhere between 100 and 120hz. This will immediately take the muddiness out of the sound. Mids can be shaped to help enhance the sound of your primary signal while adding highs will bring out the sound of a player's nails or pick. Phase relationships of the coaxial and CS sensor signals can have drastic effects on the sound. Often, I find reversing the phase of one of the pickups can fatten the overall tone of the blend and/or add clarity. Sometimes, having the pickups out of phase can have adverse effects on the sound. It all depends on the guitar's tonal properties and the acoustics of the venue.

In contrast, the VIP-M's internal microphone brings out the body resonance of the guitar. Like the CS sensor, the internal microphone is a secondary part of your signal and is meant to blend with the under saddle coaxial pickup. An acoustically well balanced guitar will sound excellent when the internal microphone is blended into the coaxial signal. Guitars that tend to be uneven in certain frequency ranges can have trouble getting a good blend with the internal mic and coaxial. However, tonal imbalances can be met with strategic EQ adjustments with excellent results.

Both the CS sensor and the internal microphone adequately pickup percussive tapping to the guitar body. This is critical for a Flamenco guitarist's golpe or players who do a lot of percussive slapping of the guitar.

Installation Fee

Installs start at $125 in addition to the cost of your pickup and shipping charges. Guitars without an existing pickup (virgin install) are $125. However, conversions from an existing pickup system will range from $150 to $175. For example, removing an existing system like a Fishman pickup or L.R. Baggs system and installing a Carlos system is $150. Removing a hexaphonic pickup like the RMC system will cost $175. The extra fee is for the labor and materials needed to fill the holes left over from the previous system and rerouting of the saddle slot if need be. All installs receive thorough play testing for proper string to string balance and feedback resistance. The action of your guitar will be measured before the install starts and matched in the final setup. However, more than one saddle can be provided if different action options are requested. Each additional saddle is $25.

Shipping cost

Shipping costs are covered by the guitar's owner. I recommend using USPS with full insurance coverage. Shipping cost for overnight and insured for $5000 typically run from $180-$205 each way. Priority mail is usually about half that. FedEx and UPS are much more expensive unless ground shipping is used.

Here are my recommendations on which system to choose:

Solo or performing with a backing track:
Any system will be great for this setting. The VIP-M or VIP-D Mono are the simplest options and only requires a mono preamp/EQ. The VIP-D (dual channel) requires a dual channel preamp/EQ blender. In all scenarios I strongly recommend running the signal through an external preamp like the Grace FELiX, AliX or BiX.

Performing at a loud volume or with a band:
I recommend the VIP-D (Coaxial and CS Sensor) either mono or dual channel. Feedback will be kept at a minimum with this system since there is no internal microphone to pickup body resonances from a loud bass player or drummer. If you choose the VIP-M you can always lower the gain on the internal microphone if feedback becomes an issue at loud performances. Running your guitar with just the coaxial signal is also totally acceptable for performing. In extremely loud cases you may find the need to do this.

Turnaround Time
The turnaround time typically runs about a week from the time I receive your guitar to when I ship it back. On some occasions an install may present some challenges achieving good string to string balance and can take a few extra days to sort out. String to string balance is paramount with all installs.

Benefits of the Carlos Pickup Systems
The number one reaction of guitarists who make the switch to a Carlos system is how their guitar finally sounds like their guitar through a speaker system. The Carlos pickup has the most dynamics and tonal range of any under saddle transducer on the market. With a proper installation and EQ adjustments the pickups are extremely feedback resistant and string to string balance is excellent.

As a full time guitarist for over 20 years I've been through a number of pickup systems; Fishman, RMC, LR Baggs, K and K to B-Band. The Carlos system is by far the best representation of your guitar sound outside of using a high end microphone to amplify your guitar live. I was so impressed with the sound I decided to become an installer. I treat every guitar I work on as if it was my own.

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