



# Crafter SA-TMVS & TV-200CEQ £439 each

Crafter returns to the entry-level bearpit with two very different models at one very competitive price... by Henry Yates



When Crafter began trading in 1972, its headquarters was a basement in Korea and its mission was to supply classical guitars to the domestic market. Over the last three decades, and under the charismatic leadership of Injae Park, the firm has transcended these humble roots to emerge as a major force in the mid-priced acoustic sector. Rounded performance and keen value for money are calling cards across Crafter's comprehensive Korea-built range, and major reasons for the firm's success in the UK (which remains its biggest export market). At £439 apiece, the two new models on test this month seek to strengthen Crafter's foothold at this hotly contested price point.

### SA-TMVS

Crafter's Slim Arch series has been given a handful of refinements since its debut at last winter's NAMM (we'll discuss these later). The guiding principle, however, remains the same. Combining piezo and mag pickups with a central sustain block and hollow wings (and allowing tone to be blended via a dedicated EQ), this new range of archtops seeks to blur the line between electric and acoustic performance. The concept of a 'hybrid' model may not be wholly original (everyone from Fly to Hamer has dabbled in this technology) but to see it done well at this price would certainly be welcome.

Both in terms of aesthetics and overall construction, we felt the SA-TMVS was a success. Keeping its entry-level price tag close to its chest, this model looks familiar but not derivative, with a single sloped cutaway offering useful access to the 21 frets, understated mother-of-pearl dot inlays compensating for a so-so rosewood 'board, and the usual f-holes shelved in favour of ornate 'Split S' soundholes grouped on the upper and lower bouts. Bar the untidy presence of two screws behind the lipstick pickup, the SA-



The Kent Armstrong Lipstick pickup brings real warmth to the SA-TMVS's tone

TMVS gave us little to complain about at surface level, and even less when we dug deeper. Following the launch of the original SAs with agathis bodies, Crafter has made the sensible decision to replace this with mahogany, routing the sound chambers from one piece. By implication, the block is mahogany too, as is a comfortable 'C'-profile set neck that welcomes fingers and picks.

To Crafter's credit, the SA series allows room to manoeuvre in terms of materials and finishes. In the case of this specific model, 'TMVS' denotes a tiger maple top and vintage sunburst finish (this extends to the overlay of the headstock) while other tops available at the same price include black maple, Andes rosewood and bubinga. These last two might arguably be more interesting from a tonal standpoint, but as a cosmetic package, we felt this tawny sunburst top worked best with the white binding and vintage contours. Like the rest of the build, it has been generally applied with care.

As we've come to expect from this manufacturer, the SA-TMVS offers a trustworthy array of hardware, with 18:1 chrome tuners holding pitch throughout our review and Tenderex employed at the nut and bridge (for its "bone-like performance", according to



Tenderex is employed on the synthetic nut to good effect

CRAFTER SA-TMVS	TEST RESULTS
Build quality	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★
<p>■ <b>WE LIKED</b> The impeccable balance of tone; build and value</p> <p>■ <b>WE DISLIKED</b> The tonal performance under more extreme distortion</p>	

Park). More exciting is the marriage of a Kent Armstrong Lipstick pickup (it's been moved closer to the neck than on the first SAs, in an attempt to find the 'sweet spot') and LR Baggs Element piezo – both balanced by an LR-F EQ.

**SOUNDS:** Under amplification, perhaps it's inevitable that the SA-TMVS's strongest suit is its versatility. Judicious use of EQ and amp settings unlocks an admirable spectrum of tones, with the Lipstick bringing booming warmth, the Element supplying a better-than-average piezo shimmer, and the 'blend' slider merging the two more convincingly than you'd think. With distorted tones less accomplished than clean, it's debatable whether the SA-TMVS would usurp a cherished rock guitar, but as an all-round weapon for softer styles, this model argues its case with eloquence. ➔

### CRAFTER SA-TMVS

**PRICE:** £439  
**ORIGIN:** Korea  
**TYPE:** Hybrid electric/acoustic  
**TOP:** Tiger maple archtop  
**BACK/SIDES:** Mahogany  
**MAX RIM DEPTH:** 50mm  
**MAX BODY WIDTH:** 380mm  
**NECK:** Mahogany, set  
**SCALE LENGTH:** 648mm (25.5-inch)  
**TUNERS:** Deluxe 18:1 chrome  
**NUT/WIDTH:** Tenderex/43mm  
**FINGERBOARD:** Indian rosewood  
**FRETS:** 21, medium  
**BRIDGE/SPACING:** Indian Rosewood/55mm  
**ELECTRICS:** Kent Armstrong Lipstick and LR Baggs Element piezo  
**WEIGHT (kg/lb):** 3.34/7.4  
**OPTIONS:** Bubinga and Andes rosewood tops also available (£439)  
**LEFT-HANDERS:** Yes (in TMVS format only)  
**FINISHES:** Vintage sunburst, black  
**Sutherland Trading**  
**029 2088 7333**  
[www.sutherlandtrading.com](http://www.sutherlandtrading.com)

### The rivals

SA-TMVS	
Parker P-36	£549
Carvin AE185	£825
Hamer Duotone Custom	£2,250

Parker is arguably the leading exponent of hybrid technology, and the P-36 combines great features with a competitive price (£549). Further up the scale is a stylish instrument with a similar vibe to the SA-TMVS. Things get more serious with the Hamer, whose stunning features and Seymour Duncan/Kynar cable pickup combination make it one for the aficionado.

CRAFTER SA-TMVS & TV-200CEQ £439 EACH

HYBRID & ELECTRO-ACOUSTIC



**CRAFTER TV-200CEQ**

**PRICE:** £439 (no case)

**ORIGIN:** Korea

**TYPE:** Electro-acoustic

**TOP:** Solid Engelmann spruce

**BACK/SIDES:** Solid mahogany

**MAX RIM DEPTH:** 100mm

**MAX BODY WIDTH:** 388mm

**NECK:** Mahogany

**SCALE LENGTH:** 648mm (25.5-inch)

**TUNERS:** Deluxe 18:1 chrome with mushroom buttons

**NUT/WIDTH:** Tenderex/45mm

**FINGERBOARD:** Indian rosewood

**FRETS:** 21, medium

**BRIDGE/SPACING:** Indian rosewood/55mm

**ELECTRICS:** L.R. Baggs piezo with LR-T Pro

**WEIGHT (kg/lb):** 2.1/4.6

**OPTIONS:** Available without EQ/cutaway (TV-200) and w/ dreadnought body (DV-200). £339

**LEFT-HANDERS:** No

**FINISH:** Satin

→ **TV-200CEQ**

In comparison with the hybrid technology of the SA-TMVS, you might be forgiven for viewing Crafter's TV-200CEQ as a rather more pedestrian affair. Maybe, but there's still an argument that the introduction of a solid orchestra model (also available without EQ and cutaway) rounds out the product line nicely, and underlines Crafter's reputation as a luthier with something for everyone. Surprisingly few companies have an orchestra model on their books – fewer still at this kind of price.

Built on the sturdy foundations of Crafter's T-bracing and equipped with contours that are infinitely more inviting than the comparable DV-200 dreadnought, the TV-200CEQ makes a strong impression from the start. With the exception of the tortoiseshell tuner buttons (a perennial Crafter faux pas), the overall vibe of this model has been weighted to perfection, with a purposeful headstock and single cutaway lending welcome attitude to an otherwise traditional cosmetic package. Acoustics in this price bracket tend to express their individuality through the soundhole design; in this case a herringbone inlay combines effectively with a tortoise pickguard.

Traditional is certainly the word for the TV-200CEQ's raw materials, although in this case that's hardly a criticism. A clean and curvaceous slice of solid Engelmann spruce is the basis for the soundboard, and this is locked to a solid mahogany back and sides via understated binding. With a degree of inevitability, an Indian rosewood fingerboard teams up with subtle pearl dots, while an LR Baggs piezo conveys the resultant tone from under the

CRAFTER TV-200CEQ	TEST RESULTS
Build quality	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★
<p>■ <b>WE LIKED</b> The inviting physical performance; decisive tone</p> <p>■ <b>WE DISLIKED</b> Those tortoiseshell buttons...</p>	

bridge. Across the board, the various components have been put together well. There's nothing more significant to flag up than a little bit of untidiness around the nut and the truss rod, and nothing to compromise the flowing performance of the 'C'-profile neck.

**SOUNDS:** As you might expect from its body size, the TV-200CEQ has a physical tendency towards finger-picked runs over chording. Whether by design or happy accident, this is complemented by the raw tone. Even without the assistance of an amp, we were impressed by a keen response to thumbed notes in the bass frequency, a defined mid-range and an incisive edge

**The crucial point is that, regardless of EQ positioning, there's always a warmth and fullness that shines through from the TV-200CEQ**

to the solos allowed by the cutaway. Thanks to the presence of an LR-T Pro, meanwhile, plugging in makes the tone a more open-ended question, with the various sliders bringing highs, lows and mids to the fore, and a 'scoop' control hollowing out the sound nicely. The crucial point is that, regardless of EQ positioning, there's always a warmth and fullness that shines through, and less of a metallic rasp than many piezo-equipped guitars in this price bracket.

**Verdict**

Rarely has a company mission statement been so perfectly encapsulated than by Crafter's SA-TMVS and TV-200CEQ. Despite their



The LR-T preamp gives the TV-200CEQ plenty of tonal options

wildly different credentials, these models are united by the exceptional value for money they represent, with levels of tone, comfort and build well above par for this price point. The second thing these two models have in common, of course, is the whiff of innovation, and this is testament to the Crafter ethos that interesting instruments and entry-level prices need not be mutually exclusive. Despite their identical price tags, the polarity in format and purpose of the SA-TMVS and TV-200CEQ makes declaring one 'better' than the other a difficult and pointless exercise. Suffice to say that both are well worthy of investigation depending on your needs, and each represents a major victory for the good people of Crafter. 📌

**Crafter SA-TMVS**

**Guitarist RATING** ★★★★★

**Crafter TV-200CEQ**

**Guitarist RATING** ★★★★★

**The rivals**

TV-200CEQ	
Takamine EG501S	£389
Tanglewood TW55	
Heritage	£599
Larrivee OM-03	£950

The Takamine G-Series is a great first stop for entry-level players, and lists an orchestra model that combines solid spruce, Bolivian rosewood and TK4NT electronics. Tanglewood's TW55 Heritage, meanwhile, recently impressed this reviewer with the warmth of its spruce/mahogany-derived tone. From there, it's not much of a stretch to the gorgeous Larrivee OM-03, whose slick build and impeccable orchestra curves go some way to justify the increased outlay.