

IBANEZ EW20ASENT £299

ELECTRO-ACOUSTICS



## Ibanez EW20ASENT £299

### The rivals

Crafter GAE-8 £289  
Washburn EA18 £299  
Ovation Celebrity CC024 £359

Similar in size, but more traditional looking, the Crafter offers a solid spruce top, laminate mahogany back/sides, abalone dot fret markers, abalone rosette, gloss finish (natural/sunburst) and Baggs pickup. The Washburn offers a similar laminate ash top/body, stained gloss finish, diamond fingerboard inlay, rosewood butterfly bridge, arched top construction and B-Band system. The Ovation Celebrity offers a natural gloss finish quilted maple top (laminated), mid-depth bowl, pearl dot fret markers and Thinline pickup/OP20 preamp (with tuner)

A taste of the exotic: Ibanez's new and surprisingly fancy looking mid-price electro is full of surprises by Matthew Wig

While the budget to mid-price acoustic guitar market is dominated by traditional looking dreadnought models, there's always room for something a bit different. The EW20ASENT and the two other electros mentioned in our spec check are the latest additions to Ibanez's Exotic Wood Series, and the first members of this series to be included in the UK range. Body size and many of the specifications mirror the current AEL models, but Ibanez has produced a bold, radical new look and some intriguing construction details that really set these electros apart.

We'll be concentrating on the unique and less obvious features, but just know that it's a pretty cleanly and carefully built instrument inside and out. There are some minor cosmetic flaws, but it scores admirably in most areas.

Inside we find the innovative and so-called 'Sound Expand' construction. It's essentially a support platform that couples the bridge plate to the end block. The extra rigidity this affords the top allows for some very light and relatively sparse X-bracing, and should allow the soundboard to vibrate more freely. Breedlove uses something comparable.

Ibanez has also redesigned several vital yet subtler elements of the guitar. It uses its own Ivorex II material (an ultra hard, durable high-pressure laminate plastic) for the nut and saddle – both of which have been radically re-shaped to help improve intonation. The bridge pins are also specially designed so they can't be pushed in too far, and so the string's ball end sits in the correct position. Even the strap



The figured ash top and sides certainly make the EW20ASENT a distinctive looker

Ibanez is a conscientious and innovative builder and there's no doubt this guitar delivers value for money on that score, with or without the figured ash

IBANEZ EW20ASENT	TEST RESULTS
Build quality	★★★★★
Playability	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★
<p>■ <b>WE LIKED</b> Generally reassuring quality; effective innovations; a great player</p> <p>■ <b>WE DISLIKED</b> Innate acoustic tone remains relatively lightweight – so probably most useful plugged in</p>	



The Ibanez SRT preamp features B-Band technology

buttons have especially wide flanges to keep your strap secure, while the own-brand tuners feature ergonomic buttons and are solid and smooth.

The pickup used here is a modified B-Band UST that uses a split construction



Ibanez's cutaway design allows for easy access for upper fret workouts



**IBANEZ EW20ASENT**

**PRICE:** £299

**ORIGIN:** China

**TYPE:** Cutaway medium-

jumbo electro-acoustic

**TOP:** Figured ash (laminated)

**BACK/SIDES:** Figured ash (laminated)

**MAX RIM DEPTH:** 125mm

**MAX BODY WIDTH:** 412mm

**NECK:** Mahogany

**SCALE LENGTH:** 642mm

**TUNERS:** Individual die-cast chrome Ibanez Smooth Tuner AS

**NUT/WIDTH:** Ivorex II/43mm

**FINGERBOARD:** Rosewood, white-bound, with pearloid 12-fret 'EW' inlay

**FRETS:** 20, slim

**BRIDGE/SPACING:** Rosewood with Ivorex II saddle/56mm

**ELECTRICS:** B-Band/Ibanez SQR

'SquealRepeal' pickup (based on B-Band's flat electret film UST, but a split design) into Ibanez SRT preamp, featuring volume, three-band EQ, shape (EQ contouring) and phase controls; onboard auto-chromatic tuner; 6.35mm jack and low-Z balanced XLR outputs. Power: two x AA batteries (compartment in output housing).

**WEIGHT (kg/lb):** 2.5/5.5

**OPTIONS:**

EW20QMEBBD (£349)

with same spec, but

featuring quilted maple

top, back, sides and

headstock overlay;

EW20WNENT (£299)

with same spec, but

featuring walnut top,

back, sides and

headstock overlay

**LEFT-HANDERS:** No

**FINISHES:** Natural gloss

body and neck (as

reviewed)

**Headstock**

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to help cancel out feedback. Ibanez's SRT preamp controls are simple, clear and user-friendly. The grippy rubberised texture and the big flattened side-mount knobs allow easy, non-slip one-finger adjustment.

This guitar has a great neck too. Its dimensions and profile (straightforward 'C') offer no surprises, so it feels immediately welcoming. String spacing could be a fraction more generous.

The fingerboard feels slightly squeaky, but is otherwise smoothly finished, while the frets have all been carefully attended to.

Alignment and all other technical issues regarding the neck are surprisingly precise for an acoustic of this standard. Ironically, intonation up in that easy access cutaway area isn't totally spot-on, but it's as tuneful as many, and perfectly workable.

**SOUNDS:** You might understandably expect an all-laminate guitar with this kind of gloss finish to sound a bit tight and thin, but the internal construction has definitely helped generate some extra resonance. It's hard to pinpoint it exactly, but there's a satisfying degree of depth and internal reverberation to the sound. It's still a bit scooped in the mid-range and light in the treble registers, but the overall balance is never harsh or edgy. Not exactly a bold, earthy or woody tone, but its smooth response is easy enough on the ear. There's good clarity for fingerpicking and it is a fairly even-toned strummer if you don't hit it too hard.

The pickup sound is, predictably, a workable compromise, but the system delivers a well-balanced output, and a smooth-sounding guitar like this will always amplify up well. The 'shape'

control allows you to vary the tonal contour for frequencies not controlled by the EQ section, for that classic scooped electro sound.

**Verdict**

Flashy guitars around this price would normally have the 'style over content' alarm bells ringing, but there's little technically awry with the EW20ASENT. Ibanez is a conscientious, innovative builder and there's no doubt this guitar delivers value for money on that score, with or without the figured ash.

For richer tone you're probably better off checking Ibanez's solid topped alternatives, but if exotic looking wood is your thing, this quality electro should serve you well. **G**

**Ibanez EW20ASENT**

**Guitarist RATING**



PHOTOGRAPHY AMANDA THOMAS