

# Turner 75CE, Tanglewood TW55DLX-B & Takamine EG523SC

£334, £459 & £473

**Big on size, big on performance – that's the allure of the jumbo. But does reality always match expectations? We try a trio of nicely priced electros to find out** by Jim Chapman

For the majority of players, the default choice when looking to buy a full-bodied acoustic is a dreadnought; and an excellent general-purpose workhorse this Martin-originated design is, comfortably outselling any other single body style over the years. It doesn't, however, have the monopoly on unplugged grunt, the other option being a jumbo.

Developed by Gibson during the 1930s, the jumbo took the acoustic guitar to another level of largeness, aimed at delivering even more bottom-end muscle and cut-through. It wasn't just cowboy crooners who took to the J-200 and its ilk for their larger-than-life appearance, but performers across a range of styles who wanted instruments better equipped to be heard acoustically in band situations.

Fast-forward to the present-day, and jumbos can be found in most manufacturers' line-ups, but the evolution of the design has gradually become more focused on cutaway electro variants. Theoretically you'll still have the benefit of a powerful-sounding acoustic, but with the bonus of amplified performance to go with it. Our three review models represent typical examples of what's available between £300 and £500, a price bracket that's not only affordable but should also ensure decent long-term quality.

## Turner 75CE

Not to be confused with American maker Rick Turner's instruments, this is one of a range of Chinese-made Turners brought into the UK by long-established importer Terry Pack. Jumbos don't come much bigger than this – the Taylor-influenced body profile with its flat Venetian cutaway measures over 17-inches across the body, and the maximum rim depth is a fulsome 124mm. The multi-ply-bound solid spruce top is an impressively clean, close-grained example, while the outer veneer of the bookmatched, laminated rosewood back is made up of five pieces, giving an attractive chevroned appearance. The body's gloss lacquering is buffed to a fine

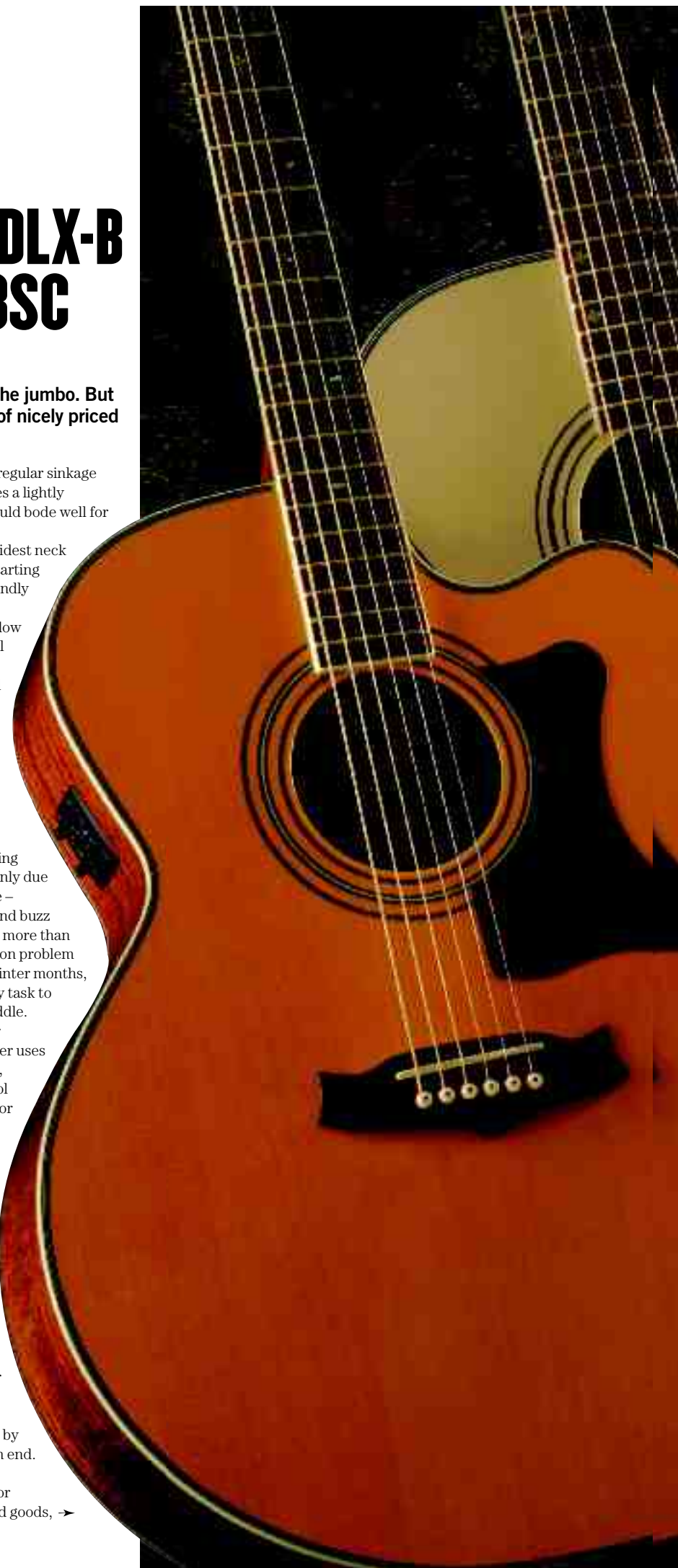
lustre, and a touch of regular sinkage into the pores indicates a lightly applied finish that should bode well for resonance.

The 75CE has the widest neck of our three guitars, starting off at a fingerstyle-friendly 45mm across the nut. Thanks to a quite shallow profile this doesn't feel deterringly broad for general use, and allied to a smooth satin finish and fret-hugging set-up it's a really slick, comfortable player. The only down side is that the already low action has become measurably lower during testing – almost certainly due to a little table sinkage – causing some smack and buzz when played anything more than gently. This is a common problem during the cold, dry winter months, but it would be an easy task to shim up the bridge saddle.

In common with our Tanglewood, the Turner uses a B-Band A3.2 system, whose compact control panel has its rotaries for volume and four-band EQ laid out in a five-on-a-dice pattern. The EQ bands are centre-notched for handy reference.

**SOUNDS:** There's a nicely fluid character to this jumbo. It responds well to even a light touch – backed by plenty of dynamics for digging in – and the easy-breathing tonal clarity is underpinned by a robust, warm bottom end.

B-Band's A3.2 has a deserved reputation for delivering the powered goods, →



TURNER 75CE, TANGLEWOOD TW55DLX-B & TAKAMINE EG523SC £334, £459 & £473

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**One minor question mark over all three of these acoustics is whether their performance is archetypally jumbo. Some might say not**

### The rivals

Crafter JE24	£389
Cort CJ5X	£469
Freshman FA300JEMS	£478

Crafter's top-range solid spruce/laminated rosewood JE24 features abalone V-rectangle position markers. Powering is a three-band (plus mid-scoop) LRS-S Plus preamp with LR Baggs under-saddle pickup. The CJ5X from Cort has a solid spruce top and solid mahogany back, and comes with a Fishman Prefix Plus system. Trim includes abalone rosette and black-buttoned Grovers. Freshman's FA300JEMS has maple back and sides and neck, with a solid spruce top. A Schertler Bluestick Onboard system, including two-band EQ, resonance and three-stage gain, provides the powering. All three are full-bodied cutaways.

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**TURNER 75CE**  
**PRICE:** £334  
**ORIGIN:** China  
**TYPE:** Cutaway jumbo electro-acoustic  
**TOP:** Solid spruce  
**BACK/SIDES:** Laminated rosewood  
**MAX RIM DEPTH:** 124mm  
**MAX BODY WIDTH:** 435mm  
**NECK:** Mahogany  
**SCALE LENGTH:** 650mm  
**TUNERS:** Chrome-plated Grovers  
**NUT/WIDTH:** Bone/45mm  
**FINGERBOARD:** Bound rosewood  
**FRETS:** 20/thin  
**BRIDGE/SPACING:** Rosewood with bone saddle/54.5mm  
**ELECTRICS:** B-Band A3.2 system with under-saddle pickup, volume, bass, middle, treble, presence, low-battery warning LED, separate quick-release battery holder  
**WEIGHT (kg/lb):** 2.45/5.4  
**OPTIONS:** All-solid spruce/rosewood 85CE (£479), laminated maple-back 65CE (£334) and ovangkol-back 45CE (£309). All with B-Band A3.2 system  
**LEFT-HANDERS:** No  
**FINISH:** Gloss natural body, satin neck  
**MI-Direct, 01634 372879**  
[www.mi-direct.co.uk](http://www.mi-direct.co.uk) or [www.turnerguitars.com](http://www.turnerguitars.com)

TURNER 75CE	TEST RESULTS
Build quality	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★

■ **WE LIKED** Long-sustaining sound; naturalness of B-Band system; fast neck  
 ■ **WE DISLIKED** Ultra-low, buzzy action, but it's easily curable

**There's a nicely fluid character to the Turner. It responds well to even a light touch – backed by plenty of dynamics for digging in**

→ and it ticks all the right boxes here. The smoothly responsive EQ hits every point between sparkling shimmer and creamy warmth, yet the system always retains the essence of the guitar's engagingly pleasant acoustic sound. An excellent partnership.

**Tanglewood TW55DLX-B**

Though not the priciest guitar on test, this 16.5-inch-wide, gloss-bodied 'Pro Series' jumbo has the distinction of being the only one to sport all-solid-wood construction. The spruce top – a flecky but otherwise decent example – is amber-tinted for an aged appearance, while the mahogany sides and back are visually well chosen, the latter displaying some subtle figuring amid its broad-banded patterning. A multi-ply centre strip highlights the bookmatching.

In other respects the well executed cosmetics are largely on a par with the Turner's, including a multi-ply bound top and decorative position markers on a white-bound fingerboard, whose binding continues round the rosewood overlaid peghead. A tortie scratchplate and gold tuners enhance the



The Turner features chrome-plated Grover tuners

**SOLID GOLD?**

That our jumbo shoot-out features an all-solid-wood model should come as no surprise. Acoustics boasting this constructional cachet are getting cheaper all the time, thanks to competitive pressures and the emergence of alternative low-cost sources of Far East production like China and Indonesia.

This downward spiral has been happening fast. Go back only six or seven years and the average starting price for a non-laminate instrument was around £700 – until, ironically, it was a German maker, Lakewood, not an Asian manufacturer, who scored a breakthrough with its all-solid D-1 dreadnought retailing under £500. The industry hasn't looked back since. Non-laminated acoustics can now be found at list prices under £300, and the likelihood of someone trumpeting a sub-£200 example doesn't seem too far off.

Great news... or is it? The main draw of solid-wood instruments is that their sound, theoretically, will mature and age much better than plywood jobs, or even part-laminates with solid tops. However, that doesn't take account of timber quality, they don't always impress straight out the box, so you're taking something of a gamble on the future. There's also the question of structural stability. Takamine, for instance, though it does offer some all-solid-wood models, has long made a virtue of using laminated sides – and sometimes backs – on many of its electro-acoustics, simply for reasons of strength and the ability to better withstand life on the road. And let's face it: they don't sound too shabby, do they?

Notwithstanding, the marketing ball of perceived value has gathered too much momentum to be halted now, and, even at the budget level, we doubt it will be too long before laminated acoustics are the exception rather than the rule.

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**TANGLEWOOD TW55DLX-B**  
**PRICE:** £459  
**ORIGIN:** China  
**TYPE:** Cutaway jumbo electro-acoustic  
**TOP:** Solid spruce  
**BACK/SIDES:** Solid mahogany  
**MAX RIM DEPTH:** 121mm  
**MAX BODY WIDTH:** 419mm  
**NECK:** Mahogany  
**SCALE LENGTH:** 650  
**TUNERS:** Gold-plated Grovers  
**NUT/WIDTH:** Bone/43mm  
**FINGERBOARD:** Bound rosewood  
**FRETS:** 20/thin  
**BRIDGE/SPACING:** Rosewood with bone saddle/53mm  
**ELECTRICS:** B-Band A3.2 system with under-saddle pickup, volume, bass, middle, treble, presence, low-battery warning LED, separate quick-release battery holder  
**WEIGHT (kg/lb):** 2.55/5.6  
**OPTIONS:** TW55DLX-FPP with Fishman Prefix Plus (£599). B-Band powered TW55NS-B with laminated sides and chrome tuners (£399 natural, £439 antique violin), or TW55NS-FPP with Prefix Plus (£499). 12-string TW55/12NS-B with B-Band is £419  
**LEFT-HANDERS:** The TW55NS-B/LH at £439 – natural only  
**FINISH:** Gloss natural body, satin neck  
**EMC**  
**01959 571600**  
**www.tanglewoodguitars.co.uk**

→ specification, though unlike the Turner and Takamine there's no second strap button, which is frankly a bit penny-pinching. But one could easily be fitted to make the guitar strap-ready.

Aside from a separate heel portion, the TW55's neck is one-piece satin-finish mahogany with a diamond volute under the headstock. Span across the nut is a regular 43mm, making for a snug grip, especially in conjunction with a shallow profile hereabouts of under 20mm. Depth increases only moderately towards the heel turn, meaning this is an easy player all the way up. The fingerboard's gentle

TANGLEWOOD TW55	TEST RESULTS
Build quality	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★

- **WE LIKED** Very smart all-round build; nice neck; B-Band tonal versatility
- **WE DISLIKED** Acoustic tone a little dry; lack of second strap button

radiusing also allows a slick, buzz-free action, and the fretting is well dressed if a little steppy in feel along the edges.

The Tanglewood's A3.2 system occupies the same position just forward of waist as on the Turner; the only difference is that the battery holder is located down near the bottom strap button rather than on the shoulder of the instrument.

**SOUNDS:** The TW55 has a different voicing to the Turner. The mid-range is subtly denser, giving an overall impression of more warmth, yet it doesn't have such an openness of texture or as fluid a sustain, and there's a touch of dryness to the tonal character which isn't always flattering.

Powered up, however, the instrument blossoms. Even at flat EQ settings, the

sound has a much more buoyant, rounded personality, and the wholly likeable attributes of the B-Band endow a tonal versatility and quality to equal that of the similarly-powered Turner.

**Takamine EG523SC**

The EG523SC, one of Takamine's lower-cost models still being made in Korea following the recent move of part of the range to China, is a handsome study in blonde. Behind the 16.7-inch-wide solid spruce front sit laminated maple back and sides, with flamed outer veneers edged in colour co-ordinating cream binding. The neck is maple too, of a slightly darker shade and lacquered, like the body, to a high gloss.

Cosmetic detailing hits an appropriately showy note. The soundhole rosette carries a wide inlay

**The Takamine does a great job on pretty much all fronts and it has that appealing element of cosmetic glitz that many of us associate with jumbos**



The Takamine adds some glamour with cream binding and flamed outer veneers

ring of abalone, similar shell being used for the V inserts in the rosewood fingerboard's pearl block inlays. The large tortie pickguard is another distinctive feature.

Adopting Takamine's usual, fairly slim profile, the neck's depth is a little fuller than our other two guitars', but it maintains an almost constant depth, giving a comfortably accessible grip at all positions. The fretting is very well dressed with smooth ends, and the board itself has a nicely oiled feel. Good also to see that string spacing at the bridge is wider than the Takamine norm – almost up to the regulation 55mm.

The EG's TK40 three-band preamp is an update of the old TK4N system, remodelled into a housing that conforms to Takamine's slot-in format. An impressive feature array includes switchable mid contour and notch filter, →

ELECTRO-ACOUSTICS



**TAKAMINE EG523SC**

**PRICE:** £473  
**ORIGIN:** Korea  
**TYPE:** Cutaway jumbo electro-acoustic  
**TOP:** Solid spruce  
**BACK/SIDES:** Laminated flamed maple  
**MAX RIM DEPTH:** 124mm  
**MAX BODY WIDTH:** 423mm  
**NECK:** Maple  
**SCALE LENGTH:** 637mm  
**TUNERS:** Chrome diecast  
**NUT/WIDTH:** Synthetic/42.5mm  
**FINGERBOARD:** Bound rosewood  
**FRETS:** 20/thin  
**BRIDGE/SPACING:** Rosewood with synthetic saddle/54.5mm  
**ELECTRICS:** Under-saddle pickup; Takamine TK40 preamp with volume, bass, mid, treble, mid contour, EQ bypass, switchable notch filter, onboard tuner, battery status LED, quick-release battery holder  
**WEIGHT (kg/lb):** 2.55/5.6  
**OPTIONS:** 12-string EG523SC-12 in natural or black (£499)  
**LEFT-HANDERS:** No  
**FINISH:** Gloss natural (also available in black)  
**Korg UK**  
**01908 857100**  
**www.takamine.co.uk**

TAKAMINE EG523SC	TEST RESULTS
Build quality	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★
<p>■ <b>WE LIKED</b> Tastefully glitzy looks; warm sound for maple; feature-packed preamp</p> <p>■ <b>WE DISLIKED</b> Brittle top end when powered up</p>	

→ and the onboard tuner – which responds promptly and accurately – is upgraded to a digital one with an LCD read-out. The unit's only drawback, as with all similar Takamine preamps, is a very oblique view of the controls because of the shoulder mounting.

**SOUNDS:** Maple-backed acoustics, though invariably very well balanced across the strings, can often sound wiry and thin. Not this fella. There's plenty of bright-edged beef to the delivery here, plus a surprising degree of sustaining warmth and richness in the low end – to the extent that the EG has the most jumbo-like acoustic sound of our three contenders.

It's largely good news when fired up too. Treble needs treating with discretion to avoid the top end sounding clacky and papery, but otherwise there's plenty of scope for fine-tuning some eminently decent sounds and all the necessary buttons, knobs and sliders to do it with.

**Verdict**

This is a trio of unequivocally well presented, sensibly priced instruments, each with their own appreciable and distinctive merits. The Turner's clean lines have a simple elegance, its semi-wide neck will attract fingerstylists without deterring the more general player, while the sound has a big-hearted, open-toned richness that comes through despite our sample's



The Turner makes the most of its B-Band system when plugged in

ambitiously low, buzz-happy action. The Tanglewood's big strength is the future-maturing potential of its all-solid construction, and although it could be argued that the unplugged sound is presently a shade lacking in character compared with the other two guitars, it certainly makes the most of the excellent B-Band system – as does the Turner – and is a rewarding electro performer in general.

The Takamine does a great job on pretty much all fronts. It has that appealing element of cosmetic glitz that many of us associate with jumbos, the maple build delivers an unexpected degree of acoustic warmth and body, while the facility-packed preamp – save for the slight caution over the treble response – delivers a varied and sure-footed palette of powered sounds,

with onboard tuning a bonus.

One minor question mark over all three of these acoustics is whether their performance is archetypally jumbo. Some might say not, because there are plenty of dreadnoughts out there that will deliver similarly sturdy, steroidal sounds. On the other hand, appearances definitely count too, and if it's only a jumbo that cuts it for you as an image statement, you'll go for one regardless. Amen to that. **G**

**Turner 75CE**

**Guitarist RATING** ★★★★★

**Tanglewood TW55DLX-B**

**Guitarist RATING** ★★★★★

**Takamine EG523SC**

**Guitarist RATING** ★★★★★