

IBANEZ A300E-VV & EW20ASE-VV £496 & £378  
ELECTRO-ACOUSTICS



PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOE BRANSTON



## Ibanez A300E-VV & EW20ASE-NT £466 & £378

Far from being all about electric guitars, Ibanez flexes its considerable muscles in the mid-priced sector with a couple of eye-catching electros *by Steve Harvey*

**K**nown primarily for its electric models, Ibanez's current acoustic and electro-acoustic offerings are far more than simply page fillers for the rear-end of the catalogue. Our two review guitars stem from differing sectors of Ibanez's electro range. The A300E hails from the Ambiance series, and the EW20ASE from the Exotic Wood range. Both models are instantly arresting, employing as they do quilted laminate tops. Both are clearly targeted at gigging musicians on a budget... so most of us, then!

### A300E-VV

The Ambiance series feature an arched back. The concept is two-fold: to resist feedback and make the guitar more comfortable to play, particularly when seated. The A300E's body is described by Ibanez as 'Original Ambiance'. We're not too sure what that means but in terms of its dimensions, the A300E is slightly narrower and shorter than a standard OM shape, though the cutaway on our review model is deeper than you'd find on a typical OM cutaway. This facilitates very easy access to the dusty end of the fretboard – a top G on the B

string requires very little stretch, for example.

With the quilted maple and vintage violin finish providing such a distinct visual vibe, Ibanez has wisely refrained from over-decoration. Apart from an understated abalone soundhole rosette, there's really little else to comment on. Instead, Ibanez has included some excellent tone-enhancing features. These include the use of bone-substitute Ivorex II for both the nut and compensated saddle. Ibanez claims it's more durable than bone and harder than the original Ivorex; we're told Ivorex II offers brilliant highs and more pronounced lows with less mid-range – characteristics particularly suited to an amplified acoustic. Ibanez has also used its own Advantage bridge pins, which aim to provide greater stability and smoother transfer of string vibration to the soundboard.

In terms of presentation, the A300E scores well, sporting nice, clean joints and tidy fretwork. On the downside, some players may feel the gloss finish is a little too thick, and we were puzzled by the shape of the headstock. We couldn't shift the feeling that it looks as if something had taken a bite out of the top of it!

The A300E is fitted with the Fishman Presys Blend Preamp, which uses an internal mic and piezo pickup. A three-band EQ, mic blend, notch filter, phase switch and tuner complete the line-up of features. But we also get a balanced XLR output as well as the standard jack – in

The A300E sings with a bright, woody tone full of mid-range, with a timbre suited to choppy chords and solos



The A300E's Fishman Presys system makes it an accomplished electric performer

### The Rivals

#### A300E-VV

Freshman's highly regarded electro range includes the **FA250JCE** (£449.95), featuring Schertler electronics and a Canadian Sitka spruce top. Yamaha's range of electros features the **FJX720SC** (£428) built using a solid spruce top and available in either natural, black or brown sunburst finish. Lastly, **Crafter's** jumbo cutaway **AEG-400SP** (£435) features a mahogany arched back and brown sunburst finish. All prices include a case.



## The Rivals

### EW20ASE-NT

**Tanglewood's TW145** (£339.95) is a powerful cedar/mahogany folk-bodied electro fitted with the B-Band A3T pickup system.

**Freshman's** range of electros includes the **Apollo 2 OCSB** (£399.95), a Sitka/rosewood guitar fitted with Fishman ION Plus electrics and flame sunburst finish. Alternatively, **Yamaha's APX500FM** (£346) comes with a flame maple top and one-way piezo pickup, preamp and tuner.

short, PA-ready. We also like that we don't have to plug the guitar in to engage the tuner.

## Sounds

Straight off the bat, the A300E sings loud with a bright, woody tone full of mid-range and 'zing', with an overall timbre well suited to choppy chord work and solos. There's plenty of sustain and volume, but when compared with a similar-priced small-bodied electro, the A300E does sound somewhat boxy, brittle and lacking in bass – no doubt due to the guitar's shallower body. So, although not the richest sounding acoustic we've encountered at this price point, staccato jazzy chords and even a splash of Gypsy jazz work very well.

Plugged in, there's a big improvement. With more tonal shades available via the blend control, we find likeable tones for a range of disciplines, be it chord or single-note work. The

three-band EQ performs its duties well and helps offer an increased palette of timbres and the powerful output packs a lot of punch, so watch your amp or PA's input level to avoid distortion or too-quick entry into feedback.

### EW20ASE-NT

The EW20ASE hails from the Exotic Wood Series, which uses less common, highly decorative woods but without the expense of solid walnut, cherry, koa and the like. It has a deeper body and is wider across the lower bout than its review partner. Measuring just shy of 16 inches, it pushes what Ibanez describes as the 'Original EW Body' into jumbo territory. The Breedlove-like Florentine cutaway augments what is already a striking guitar. It has to be said, however, that the quilted ash top won't be to everyone's liking. Initial reactions could be best described as Marmite-like: you either love it or you don't. But personal taste aside, the presentation here is good. We particularly like the stylish 12th fret 'squiggle' – Ibanez says nothing of its relevance, but we appreciate it nonetheless!

As with its stablemate, the EW20ASE boasts an interesting design feature in the bridge area. Directly beneath each string a small rebate has been cut into the bridge, which has been done to allow for an ultra-low action. If desired, the bridge can be shaved right down, with the rebate facilitating a trouble-free action. It's a design feature that shows Ibanez is keen to ensure electric players feel at home with its electros.

All Exotic Wood Series guitars come fitted with the Ibanez SRTc preamp. You get bass, mid and treble centre-indented sliders plus a tuner button, phase reverse and anti-feedback slider. The most

interesting feature, however, is the built-in chorus, controlled with a simple push button. While we are impressed with this, less endearing is the preamp's length, which means that it fails to sit flush across the

## Ibanez T35 Troubadour acoustic amp £264.95

This dual-mode acoustic amp was launched in 2010 and the Troubadour range also includes the T80, T20 and T10 – prices start at just £89. Producing 35 watts through a 10-inch coaxial speaker (with tweeter) the T35 offers three-band EQ with sweepable mid, natural/shaped mode switch, chorus with depth/speed controls and reverb.

Vocal duties are catered for with XLR microphone input, with tone and volume rotaries controlling an independent mic preamp. Additional functionality comes in the form of CD/aux input (facilitating mp3 or CD connectivity), headphone out, footswitch jack and line out. The cabinet is smart to look at and, weighing in at just over 10kgs, feels sturdy enough for a life of hard graft. The T35 also performs really well, offering plenty of power and tone-shaping options. When engaged, the shaped

mode scoops out the mids and produces a bright, open tone that tightens up the bottom end. In natural mode, the amp responds particularly well to subtle changes in dynamics.

The onboard chorus is excellent and perfectly controllable with the depth and speed rotaries. It's a perfectly adequate amp for small venue duties and with line-out jacks and mic capabilities all for just over £250, we'd suggest it makes a great purchase for home enthusiasts and small gig regulars alike.





The laminated quilted ash top is going to polarise opinion...

Though nearly £100 less, the EW20ASE possesses a greater variety of acoustic tones and dynamics

guitar's curves, leaving one end of the control plate floating. But this annoyance aside, the presentation is good.

### Sounds

Like its review partner, the EW20ASE's tone is predominately mid-range heavy, although on the whole we find that it is a sweeter sounding guitar than the A300E. Offering a more balanced overall voice, the EW20ASE is more uniform in its delivery too. Open chords have some of the character missing in comparison to the A300E, but though coming in at nearly £100 less, the EW20ASE possesses a greater variety of acoustic tones and dynamics.

Amplified, the EW20ASE performs particularly well, producing a balanced and usable output. Feedback seems to be less of an issue yet output levels are still high. Punching in some chorus via the button on the control panel is fun and a boon to the guitar's core sound, though the effect itself is a little overcooked for our tastes. A depth rotary would be a welcome addition here. Overall though, we like this guitar's plugged-in capabilities.

### Verdict

Because of the excellent set-up and slim profile necks, these guitars will appeal to many electric players crossing over

into the acoustic realm. Though perhaps lacking in purely acoustic tonal capabilities, both models are clearly designed to be played amplified – and good they are too. Perhaps some will struggle with the very 'American' and contemporary design but, for gigging players willing to embrace innovative and modern styling, the Ambiance and Exotic Wood series of guitars are well worth checking out. Both the A300E and the EW20ASE prove there's a lot more to Ibanez than electric signature models and Tube Screemers! **G**

### The Bottom Line

#### Ibanez A300E-VV

**We like:** Looks; electronics; good set-up

**We dislike:** Unplugged performance; price

**Guitarist says:** A good-looking electro that's most at home plugged in

#### Ibanez EW20ASE-NT

**We like:** Chorus at the touch of a button; price

**We dislike:** Ill-fitting preamp control panel

**Guitarist says:** A well-made, modern electro offering a lot of guitar for the money



### A300E-VV

**PRICE:** £466.80  
**ORIGIN:** China  
**TYPE:** Small-bodied cutaway electro  
**TOP:** Laminated quilted maple  
**BACK/SIDES:** Laminated quilted maple  
**MAX RIM DEPTH:** 115mm  
**MAX BODY WIDTH:** 386mm  
**NECK:** Mahogany  
**SCALE LENGTH:** 641mm (25.2 inches)  
**TUNERS:** Grover  
**NUT/WIDTH:** Ivorex II/43mm  
**FINGERBOARD:** Rosewood  
**FRETS:** 21, medium  
**BRIDGE/SPACING:** Rosewood/56mm  
**ELECTRONICS:** Fishman Sonicore pickup with Fishman Presys Blend Preamp with built-in internal mic  
**WEIGHT (kg/lb):** 2.3/5.0  
**OPTIONS:** Available in vintage violin (as reviewed), trans-blue sunburst and black cherry sunburst  
**LEFT-HANDERS:** No  
**FINISH:** High-gloss (as reviewed)  
**Ibanez Guitars**  
**0121 508 6666**  
**www.ibanez.com**

### Test results

Build quality	★★★★☆
Playability	★★★★☆
Sound	★★★★☆
Value for money	★★★★☆

**GUITARIST RATING** ★★★★★



### EW20ASE-NT

**PRICE:** £378  
**ORIGIN:** China  
**TYPE:** Jumbo cutaway electro  
**TOP:** Laminated quilted ash  
**BACK/SIDES:** Laminated quilted ash  
**MAX RIM DEPTH:** 123mm  
**MAX BODY WIDTH:** 406mm  
**NECK:** Mahogany  
**SCALE LENGTH:** 641mm (25.2 inches)  
**TUNERS:** Ibanez Smooth AS  
**NUT/WIDTH:** Ivorex II/43mm  
**FINGERBOARD:** Rosewood  
**FRETS:** 21, medium  
**BRIDGE/SPACING:** Rosewood/56mm  
**ELECTRONICS:** B-Band undersaddle transducer pickup and Ibanez SRTc preamp  
**WEIGHT (kg/lb):** 2.3/5.0  
**OPTIONS:** Available in quilted ash (as reviewed), figured bubinga and cordia  
**LEFT-HANDERS:** Yes, no upcharge  
**FINISH:** Natural high-gloss (as reviewed)

### Test results

Build quality	★★★★☆
Playability	★★★★☆
Sound	★★★★☆
Value for money	★★★★☆

**GUITARIST RATING** ★★★★★