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PRS SE A15AL Alex Lifeson Thinline & AE10E

£899 & £579

Another artist joins PRS's SE ranks, this time in the form of Rush's evergreen Alex Lifeson, while the standard SE electro also gets a mahogany makeover

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What You Need To Know

- 1 These are cheap for PRS... what gives?**
Yes. Like the SE electric line, these acoustics are made in Korea, but by a company called Wildwood: the electrics are made by World Music.
- 2 Are they based on the USA-made Angelus?**
Yes, in terms of outline and bracing they are similar to the USA model and the now discontinued SE Angelus Standard and Custom. Both these new electros have soundhole-placed volume and tone controls instead of a side-mounted preamp.
- 3 What's 'thinline' about the Alex Lifeson model?**
The Lifeson model's body depth is reduced, which can help reduce feedback compared with a full-size acoustic.

Back in 2009, PRS surprised us by launching high-end acoustics, with the intention of becoming a major force in the acoustic guitar world. The reality proved different and after weathering the global financial turndown, it decided to invest in the new USA S2 electrics and let the USA acoustics continue to make their mark with artists and high-end collectors. While we did get the Angelus Standard and Custom in the much more affordable SE line, the electro models still came in around the £1k mark – a little too hot, price-wise, to make any kind of serious dent in the cut-throat world of the Asian-made electro-acoustic guitar.

The second phase of PRS's SE electro attack looks better aimed with this new pair of guitars much more competitively priced. Alex Lifeson has been a PRS electric player for many years, though he's never been a signature artist until now, with this

affordable version of his £8,600 Private Stock model. Although the previous Angelus Standard and Custom have been ditched in favour of this and the non-signature A10E, just to confuse us, both guitars still have the SE Angelus logo on their headstocks, despite PRS making

no mention of the Angelus in either new instrument's model name. Odd. Anyway...

Both these not-called Angelus models are indeed based on the USA Angelus with a 394mm (15.5-inch) wide body that sits between Taylor's Grand Concert and Grand Auditorium



The Lifeson's back and sides are interestingly figured dao laminate



sizes and Martin's 000/OM and dreadnought with a bit of mini-jumbo thrown in. They're every bit the model cutaway electro.

There are plenty of similarities beyond the outline in terms of the electric-like headstocks, tuners, bone nut and compensated saddles, the rosewood 'boards and bridges and the under-saddle pickup system with its discreet soundhole-placed volume and tone controls. Both have bird inlays, too – although those on the Lifeson are a little more subtle and offset. The primary differences, however, are more profound. The AE10E is full depth; the Lifeson is, as its name implies, thinline. In hard benefit it equates to an approximately 14mm reduction in depth on the

Both have plenty of acoustic clout, with the Lifeson's construction creating a bit more midrange push

Lifeson, which reduces the amount of soundbox air and also makes the guitar a little more comfortable, especially played seated. Internally, both use spruce braces, back and top, the latter with hybrid X/classical fan bracing that's crucial to the original USA Angelus design.

Then there are the wood specs. Whereas the previous SE models used solid Sitka spruce tops and either solid mahogany or rosewood backs with matching laminate sides, here

the Lifeson retains the solid spruce top but with laminated dao back and sides – a fairly attractive light-brown striped wood – with contrasting tortoiseshell-like mottled binding. The A10E swaps solid spruce for a quite trendy solid mahogany top, paired with laminate mahogany and either a white binding on the black gloss-finished guitar, or a less contrasting black on the Tortoise Shell deep burgundy translucent. The Lifeson's soundhole decoration is a little

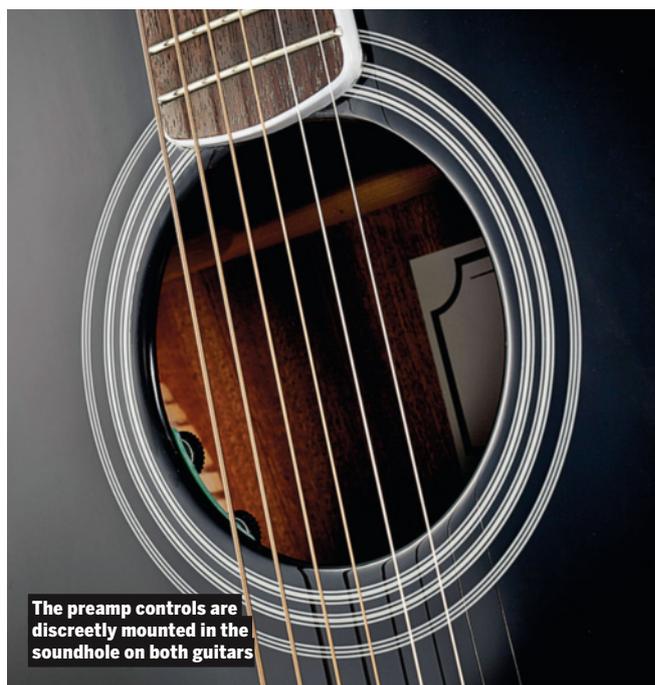
more upmarket, too, with an inlaid wood centre, while the AE10 goes for concentric white and black plastic rings.

Necks are very similar with a quite electric-like nut width, broader saddle spacing and similar depths that average out at 22.6mm at the 1st fret and 24.6mm at the 10th, with a deep rounded 'C' profile and very subtly V'd sloping shoulders in the lower positions. Both necks are three-piece with the headstock spliced on and an additional heel piece, and both have strengthening volutes behind the nut.

Fretting is very tidy and it's hard to fault the construction at all in terms of detail. The over-glossy finish, although clearly not over-thick, does hint at the



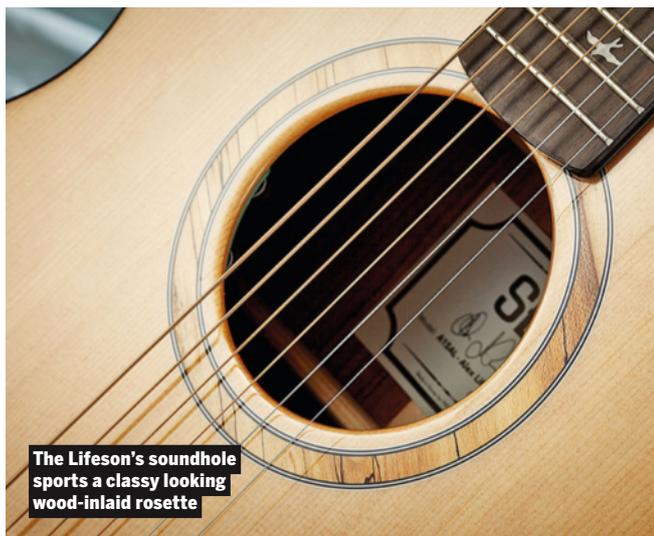
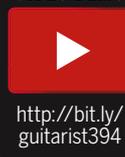
Both bear the Angelus logo on the headstock, but nowhere else!



The preamp controls are discreetly mounted in the soundhole on both guitars



The A10E's Black gloss finish hides a solid mahogany top



The Lifeson's soundhole sports a classy looking wood-inlaid rosette

guitars' origin and give both a very 'import' feel.

Sounds

Acoustically, neither will have you blubbing with emotion. Certainly, if you've had a strum on the USA models then these are much more run-of-the-mill. If there is a similarity, shape aside, we have to say while hardly cannon-like (an often used term to describe the projection of the USA models), there's plenty of acoustic clout here, especially the Lifeson – its different construction creates a bit more midrange push. The A10E's mids are less forceful, and the lows, while not hugely enhanced, create more depth and a strummier, almost dread-like tonality as opposed to the more 'small body' voice of the Lifeson.

Both guitars offer onboard controls, but they're of limited help in a stage environment. We audition both through a Fishman Platinum Pro outboard EQ going directly into Line 6's StageSource. With our EQs set flat and the volume and tone fully up (which, like most soundhole controls, means you turn them 'down', away from you), there's an ear-wearing amount of hard-edged highs, a very strong and hard midrange and limited lows. Backing off some of the tone control, even fully off, is a pretty good start but then you have to go outboard and pull out some of those hard mids – around 1kHz

on the Fishman – and some thickness in the lower mids from the StageSource's sweepable midrange. As you'd expect, while the electronics are shared, the acoustic character of both guitars also comes into play. The A10E has noticeably more lows than the tighter Lifeson, and because of that we'd certainly favour it for louder stage use.

Verdict

There are no shortage of electros at these price points and although these will sell at lower street prices, it's a little hard to see exactly what PRS is bringing to an already crowded table. Regardless, both are smartly made, include a hard case, and each one has slick playability with a clean, strong acoustic voice. The A10E is a perfectly viable at-home acoustic, though it does lack some of the darker roundness that you'd expect from its mahogany construction. The Lifeson's thinline body may be more comfortable for some, and this combined with its wood choice gives it subtly tighter lows and a bit more upper mid push – it feels the more resonant of the two. Both will need some extra help on stage, but with fairly typical outboard EQ settings the electro sound was perfectly acceptable at this price-point. Irrelevant of its signature status, it'd be the Lifeson model we'd take home. **G**



PRS SE A15AL Alex Lifeson Thinline

PRICE: £899 (inc case)
ORIGIN: Korea
TYPE: 14-fret grand concert-size cutaway electro acoustic
TOP: Solid spruce with PRS X/classical hybrid bracing
BACK/SIDES: Laminated dao
MAX RIM DEPTH: 98mm tapering to 79mm
MAX BODY WIDTH: 394mm
NECK: Mahogany
SCALE LENGTH: 644mm (25.35")
TUNERS: Individual PRS-logo'd enclosed, chrome-plated
NUT/WIDTH: Bone/42.3mm
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood, pearloid 'birds in flight' inlays, 254mm (10") radius
FRETS: 20, medium
BRIDGE/SPACING: Rosewood with compensated bone saddle/54.5mm
ELECTRICS: Under-saddle pickup system with sound-hole mounted volume and tone control
WEIGHT (KG/LB): 2.27/5
OPTIONS: None
RANGE OPTIONS: Just the A10E in the SE line, the USA Private Stock Lifeson model, with LR Baggs Lyric pickup costs £8.6k
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISH: Natural gloss (as reviewed)
PRS Europe
01223 874301
www.prsguitars.com

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

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

Guitarist says: It'll need some help on stage, but this is a classy thinline electro that makes a great at-home guitar



PRS SE A10E

PRICE: £579 (inc case)
ORIGIN: Korea
TYPE: 14-fret grand concert-size cutaway electro acoustic
TOP: Solid mahogany with PRS X/classical hybrid bracing
BACK/SIDES: Laminated mahogany
MAX RIM DEPTH: 112mm tapering to 93mm
MAX BODY WIDTH: 394mm
NECK: Mahogany
SCALE LENGTH: 644mm (25.35")
TUNERS: Individual PRS-logo'd enclosed, chrome-plated
NUT/WIDTH: Bone/42.3mm
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood, pearloid bird inlays, 254mm (10") radius
FRETS: 20, medium
BRIDGE/SPACING: Rosewood with compensated bone saddle/54.5mm
ELECTRICS: Under-saddle pickup system with sound-hole mounted volume and tone control
WEIGHT (KG/LB): 2.4/5.28
OPTIONS: None
RANGE OPTIONS: Just the A15AL
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISH: Black gloss (as reviewed) and Tortoise Shell gloss

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

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

Guitarist says: Equally well made, the A10E is just a little ordinary in the sound department compared to the Lifeson

Workhorse Power

PRS's new SEs face plenty of stiff competition from some of the mainstays of the low-to-mid electro-acoustic market. Here are some options...



Tanglewood TW130SMCE £369

An all-solid mahogany orchestra electro cutaway, the exhaustively named Tanglewood TW130 SM CE might lack the refinement of the A10E, but it still boasts a good quality B-Band Crescent electro system with soundhole-placed controls and Natural satin finish. There's no case either, but at this price, who's bothered?

Farida R-15E £399

This classy non-cutaway, 14-fret OM-style electro has a solid mahogany top, laminate mahogany back and sides and sonokelin fingerboard and bridge. Its power comes from a Fishman Presys Blend system with under-saddle piezo and a built-in mic. That said, it might need a little TLC to the frets and fingerboard, and doesn't come with a case.

Faith FNCEMG Neptune £799

Made in Asia but designed by the UK electric and acoustic luthier extraordinaire Patrick Eggle, this is a great all-solid mahogany choice. Other notable enhancements include a Maccasan ebony fingerboard, Shadow Performer tuner/preamp and Shadow under-saddle pickup. The finish is satin and, like the PRSs, a case is included.



Yamaha CPX700II
£584

Here's another mainstream solid spruce/laminated nato cutaway electro, classed as a mini-jumbo by the Japanese acoustic giant. It is heavily spec'd on the electro side of things, too, with a single ART under-bridge contact sensor and the System 64 preamp with three-band EQ and onboard tuner. Again, it doesn't come with a case.

Vintage VE2000DLX
Gordon Giltrap
£599

The VE2000DLX was originally designed by Brit-maker Rob Armstrong, and tops a mini-range of Gordon Giltrap signature guitars. It comes with solid spruce top paired with solid rosewood back and laminate rosewood sides, and features a Fishman Rare Earth Blend soundhole pickup and comes with a case.

Martin Performing Artist
GPCPA5 Grand Performance
£799 (street price)

Big name and big value electro, especially at its street price, this one features a solid Sitka spruce top with mahogany laminate back and sides and Stratabond neck, Richlite fingerboard plus Fishman F1 Analog electronics. There's no case included and it's not fancy, but it's still very roadworthy.