

TAKAMINE EG50TH ANNIVERSARY & LTD 2012 'MICHİ' £550 & £2,518
ELECTRO-ACOUSTICS



PHOTOGRAPHY BY JESSE WILD



Takamine EG50TH Anniversary & LTD 2012 'Michi' £550 & £2,518

With half a century of luthiery under their belts, does the team at Takamine truly have something to celebrate? We think so... *by Russell Welton*

Founded in 1962 in Sakashita, Japan, at the base of the mountain that gave the company its name, Takamine was noticed in the early seventies for its well-priced replicas of Martin and Guild guitars. Ironically, a commercial tie-up with Kaman, the company behind electro-acoustic pioneers Ovation, meant that, by the late seventies, after Takamine had developed its own Palathetic pickup system, Kaman effectively had commercial interest in the two main electro-acoustic guitar brands of the day. In further irony, it was Takamine's traditionally-made guitars that had longer-lasting appeal over Ovation's plastic bowl-backed guitars.

After 25 years of guitar making, Takamine started its annual Limited Edition guitars in 1987 and, this year, celebrating 50 years honing its craft, we have more. Here, we look at the first G Series annual limited edition, the EG50TH Anniversary, plus the none-more-black LTD 2012 'Michi'.

Takamine explains the series: "Guided by the theme of

'Michi', the Japanese concept of a path or a course to follow over a distance, the 2012 Limited Edition Series commemorates the course of Takamine's 50-year history. Each guitar features a stunning growing vine motif that symbolizes Takamine's long and vital life, and this unique design will never be duplicated again."

EG50TH Anniversary

It's no surprise that this cutaway dreadnought grabs your attention immediately: the decorated pickguard mirrors the fingerboard's 'growing vine' motif in mother-of-pearl, while a three-leaf cluster sits at the 'board's 12th fret in a gold/white/gold pattern. This understated design also shows

on the pickguard, although it does appear to be painted on.

Aside from the inlay, the 'board is devoid of position markers, but you do get black dot markers on the cream edge binding, providing sufficient reference. The neck profile is a consistent 'C', finished in gloss like the rest of the guitar. This particular example has a broad flame pattern traversing the bass side of the neck, adding a little more wow factor. Also visible is the stacked four-piece heel, which is capped in more of the cream plastic that edges the top and back of the body's purfling, along with a single thin stringer adjoining the mahogany back panels.

Another classy Limited Edition feature is the soundhole rosette. The inner circle sandwiches a gold-textured fabric with sporadic flecks of black and orange between two cream circles.

The EG50TH is typical Takamine: an extremely competent electro-acoustic



The TP4T preamp may be basic, but its built-in tuner is highly responsive

The Rivals

EG50TH

The **Ibanez AW3010CE-LG** (£658) comes with a solid engelmann spruce top and mahogany back and sides, plus an LR Baggs Element pickup and EAS-VTC preamp. **Yamaha's AC1M** (£598) has a Sitka spruce top with mahogany back and sides, ebony bridge and System 66 electronics. The new **Breedlove Passport D250/SMe-FS** (£545) similarly sports solid Sitka spruce with mahogany, VTC Electronics, integrated digital tuner and two-band EQ



Guitarist
CHOICE



Takamine LTD 2012 C £2,518

This final guest at the Takamine anniversary party is quite the stunner! It features the same materials and pickup/preamp specs as its steel-string sibling, but with even better-looking chocolate-brown body binding, black fingerboard binding, Spanish rosette-style purfling and rear centre stripe. It has a classical-style fan bracing, though the oval soundhole and elongated fingerboard – which mirror the high-end TH90 Hirade – are less conventional.

Scale length is the classical standard, 650mm, while nut width (51.5mm) and bridge string spacing (58mm) are equally standard, as are the ebony fingerboard and 12-frets-to-the-body neck join. Unusually for a cutaway electro, there are no side dots. It's weighty too, at 2.4kg, a kilo heavier than a luthier-made Spanish concert classical, but then it does have that Cool Tube preamp.

Aside from that, it's a pretty conventional guitar, with scalloped 'X' bracing under the solid spruce top, while the back and sides are laminated. Set-up is good: a nicely cut Corian nut and intonated saddle with a relatively low action, although string spacing at the bridge is fairly regular at 52mm.

Of course, this is an electro, and features the commonly used Takamine TP4T preamp that, along with three-band EQ and volume, includes an onboard tuner, although it lacks any feedback-busting notch filtering or phase control.

Sounds

A healthy tonal richness emerges from the guitar, with good sustain and typical dreadnought depth, but with good note separation, while the top-end sounds very clear. It certainly stays well out of the 'boxy' and 'dry' camps.

Amplified, too, the EG50TH is no slouch. We found a little additional treble was necessary to replicate the acoustic performance's clarity, while the onboard tuner is fast and accurate in operation. In many ways, it's typical Takamine: an extremely competent acoustic and electro.

LTD 2012 'Michi'

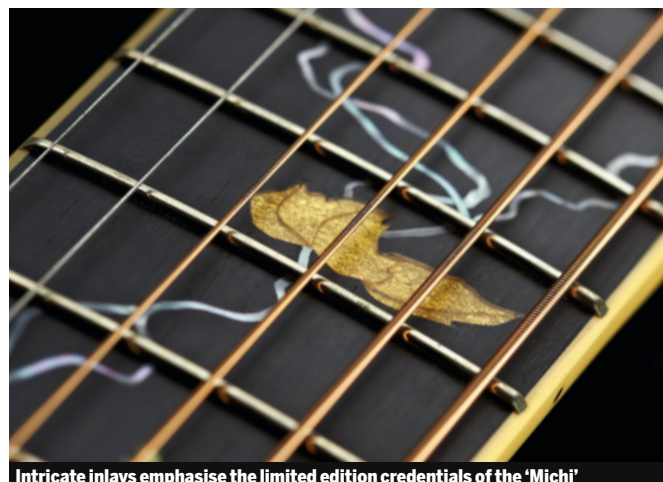
After opening the arched-top brown leather-effect hardcase, you are greeted with a small certificate of authenticity validating the not-to-be-repeated design themes, a triangular pendant in a gold logo'd pouch, a branded duster, headstock sticker and case-carrying shoulder strap. If the case-less EG50TH only hints at the party, the LTD 2012 'Michi', in its all black gloss livery, is quite breathtaking.

Here, you have a properly inlaid scratchplate, which has a

deep and lustrous look, as does the whole finish of the spruce-topped rosewood body. The inlays feature subtle details of red berry fruits, veined leaves and a small songbird. It's tasteful and not outrageous. The fingerboard inlays are far more detailed on this model, with more veins and narrow limbs stretching from the eighth to 15th fret. There are gold-coloured details aplenty on the purfling and rosette, while the gold-effect headstock logo is more prominent than the EG's outlined logo, and is framed by gold-plated tuners contrasted by a black rosewood headstock facing.

The solid black finish, of course, hides any outer view of the scalloped X-braced solid spruce top, or the rosewood back. The fingerboard here is ebony and, once again, set-up is good: the nut and saddle are bone and, overall, the level of

The sound of the 'Michi' is sonorous, wide, engulfing and prominent



Intricate inlays emphasise the limited edition credentials of the 'Michi'

The Rivals

LTD 2012 'Michi'

The **Takamine Yozakura LC-03** (£1,919) Limited Edition has a solid cedar top, solid sapele back and sides, kimono silk inlays and ebony board. **Takamine's T50TH Anniversary** (£5,543) is its flagship anniversary model, with solid cocobolo back and sides, fingerboard plant inlay, inlaid scratchplate and vintage gold hardware. **Yamaha's LJX26CP SRT** (£3,595) has an Engelmann spruce top, solid rosewood back and sides and vintage microphone preamp settings



The black-on-black scratchplate exudes class, even if it looks too good to touch

craftsmanship exudes quality. The EG50TH is good, but it's not in the same league.

Mind you, the black gloss finish shows up all fingerprints, and it almost seems too posh to play. You also get a top-of-the-line Takamine endpin jack socket instead of the basic, less hardy unit of the EG, and there is a matching gold-plated strap button offset at the heel. Perhaps a matching black heel cap would look smarter still.

Sounds

Vibrant and alive, there's an exciting balance between this acoustic's depth and warmth of projection and roundness in the top end. It's a far more luxuriant sound than the EG50TH, but, then, you'd expect that. It's sonorous, wide, engulfing and prominent. Plugging in, the Takamine Palathetic pickup and Cool Tube preamp create a nicely detailed tone. You can mix in more warmth from the 12AU7 dual triode valve, and the harmonic content of the sound takes on more vibrancy. The mid-range is selectable from 250Hz to 4.5kHz. You can then cut or boost at whatever frequency suits, while the bass and treble sliders quickly tailor the sound – your personalised 'voice'. It's a very flexible and intuitive system, though it does add physical weight to the guitar and, acoustically, the timbre is so dynamic, you would surely want to mic this guitar whenever you could.

Verdict

Once upon a time, Takamine was top of the heap in terms of electro-acoustic performance. Today, things are very different, with all sorts of pickup systems and electros right across the

price range. Limited editions also proliferate today – annual, seasonal, etc – which certainly wasn't the case back in 1987.

What hasn't changed, though, is Takamine's dedication to quality in terms of build and electronics – a major reason why we still see so many on stages large and small. The EG50TH is a neat and affordable celebratory take on numerous other Takamine electros, while the 'Michi' reminds us, if needed, of the sumptuous quality of Takamine's high-end instruments. It's a guitar that holds its own, 50 years on, in the vastly expanded world of the modern-production electro-acoustic. **G**

The Bottom Line

Takamine EG50TH Anniversary

We like: Attention to detail; fantastic playability; value for money

We dislike: No gigbag

Guitarist says: A slice of the extraordinary, without the matching hiked price tag – an excellent all-rounder

Takamine LTD 2012 'Michi'

We like: Stunning sonic timbre; resonance and uniqueness; stealthy looks

We dislike: Sensitivity to visible fingerprints

Guitarist says: Beautiful for the studio – a real keeper and first-port-of-call instrument for most genres. A work of art with practical uses. Cherish it



Takamine EG50TH Anniversary

PRICE: £550

ORIGIN: China

TYPE: Dreadnought cutaway

TOP: Solid spruce

BACK/SIDES: Laminated mahogany

MAX RIM DEPTH: 120mm

MAX BODY WIDTH: 400mm

NECK: Mahogany

SCALE LENGTH: 644mm

(25.35 inches)

TUNERS: Gold-plated enclosed

NUT/WIDTH: Corian/42.5mm

FINGERBOARD: Bound rosewood,

'Growing Vine' inlay, 300mm

(11.8-inch) radius

FRETS: 20, medium

BRIDGE/SPACING:

Rosewood/52mm

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 2.38/5.24

ELECTRICS: Takamine CP102C

under-saddle pickup, with TP4T onboard preamp with three-band EQ, volume and tuner

OPTIONS: None

RANGE OPTIONS: Other 2012 dreadnoughts include the EG340DLX (£658) with TP4T preamp, solid bear-claw spruce top, abalone inlays and flamed mahogany back and sides, and the EG355SC-TB (£586) with TP4T preamp, solid spruce top, quilted maple back and sides and snowflake inlays

LEFT-HANDERS: No

FINISH: Gloss polyurethane

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Test results

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

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★



Takamine LTD 2012 'Michi'

PRICE: £2,518 (inc case)

ORIGIN: Japan

TYPE: Dreadnought cutaway

TOP: Solid spruce

BACK/SIDES: Solid rosewood back and laminated rosewood sides

MAX RIM DEPTH: 120mm

MAX BODY WIDTH: 400mm

NECK: Mahogany

SCALE LENGTH: 644mm

(25.35 inches)

TUNERS: Gold-plated enclosed

NUT/WIDTH: Bone/42.5mm

FINGERBOARD: Bound ebony,

'Growing Vine' inlay, 300mm

(11.8-inch) radius

FRETS: 20, medium, nickel

BRIDGE/SPACING:

Rosewood/52mm

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 2.84/6.25

ELECTRICS: Takamine Palathetic transducer with Cool Tube CTP-2 preamp, Cool Tube blend, three-band EQ (with sweepable mid-range), volume, aux pickup mix and tuner

OPTIONS: None

RANGE OPTIONS: Takamine's T50TH Anniversary (£5,543) features cocobolo back and sides, a selected spruce top, mahogany neck, maple binding, growing vine inlay on ebony fingerboard, gold leaf trim rosette and Japanese custom hardcase

LEFT-HANDERS: No

FINISH: Gloss black (polyurethane)

Test results

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

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★