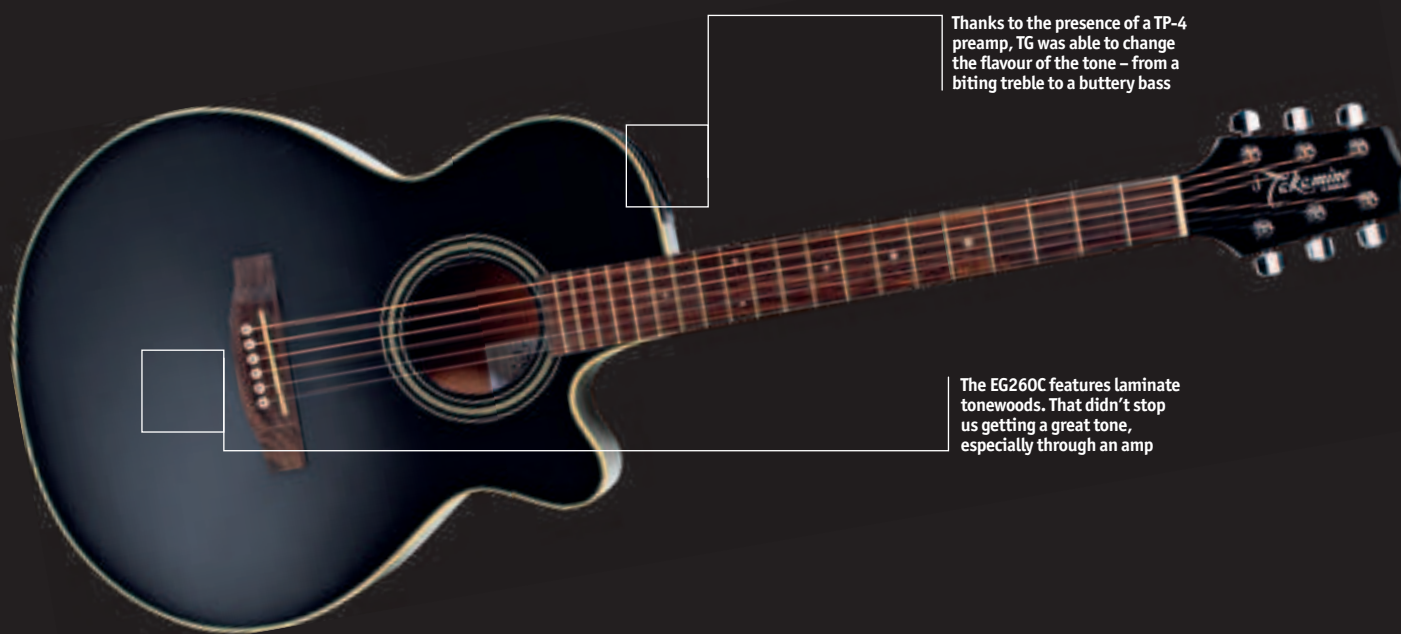


GEAR TAKAMINE ELECTRO-ACOUSTICS



Thanks to the presence of a TP-4 preamp, TG was able to change the flavour of the tone – from a biting treble to a buttery bass

The EG260C features laminate tonewoods. That didn't stop us getting a great tone, especially through an amp

£299

TAKAMINE ELECTRO-ACOUSTICS

TG CHECKS OUT TAKAMINE'S LATEST ENTRY LEVEL ELECTRO-ACOUSTIC GUITARS. BUT DID THEY HIT THE G-SPOT? WORDS: HENRY YATES

> In the beginning, Takamine was the name of a craggy old mountain outside the Japanese town of Sakashita. The most exciting thing that ever happened there was when a mountain goat sprained its ankle. The most rock 'n' roll thing about it was that it was, y' know, made of rock. It seemed a strange place to set up a business making handcrafted acoustic guitars, but that's exactly what happened in 1962 when a family of luthiers opened their premises in the foothills. Logically enough, the fledgling company took its name from the mountain and thus Takamine was born.

No-one gives a toss about that old mountain these days, but over a 44-year timeline studded with guitar innovations, awards and artist endorsements, Takamine has become one of the most prominent names in the acoustic guitar sector. You could argue that Takamine's success is down to the sheer quality of their premium instruments (built in Japan to shit-kickingly high standards).

We would counter that it's equally down to their G-Series: the entry-level range of Chinese instruments that was introduced several years ago to blanket acclaim. To illustrate our point, we have decided to test the two latest additions to this burgeoning range in the form of the EG260C (the black one, above) and the EG440SC (the blonde one on p.149).

INFORMATION

ORIGIN: China
TOP: Spruce (laminated)
BODY/SIDES: Mahogany (laminated)
NECK: Mahogany
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood
FRETS: 20
HARDWARE: Chrome tuners
PREAMP: TP-4
GIGBAG: No
LEFT-HANDER: No
CONTACT: Korg UK
 01908 857100
WEB: www.takamine.co.uk

TAKAMINE EG260C

Cheap guitars are the lifeblood of rock 'n' roll. And they don't come much cheaper than the EG260C, introduced by Takamine last June to bolster their budget line. According to the sales rep TG spoke to, you won't ever

see a G-Series electro-acoustic for less than this. They're not a bloody charity, you know.

A quick visual inspection of the EG260C pushes all the right buttons. The body shape is known as the 'FXC'. Loosely translated, this means it's a little more compact than your average dreadnought and should theoretically excel at fingerpicked runs. The basic outline is complemented by a generous single cutaway and a strap pin that doubles



You've gotta love Takamine's simple but classic approach to guitar design

The EG440SC's TP-4T preamp features a chromatic tuner, invaluable for dark stages

For £60 more, the EG440SC includes a solid spruce top and a tidier finish. We felt the tone had more character too

£239

as the lead input, while the neck, body and headstock are all coated in black gloss (we also had the option to choose from either a Sunburst finish or Wine Red). As a general rule of thumb, TG prefers to see the grain of our acoustic guitars, but we will grudgingly admit that the smoky finish works well with the white binding in this instance.

There's nothing wrong with the cornerstones of the EG260C's build, with a tough-looking heel and a good fretboard both inspiring confidence. At the same time, we have seen tidier finishes than this. The soundhole and the edges of the fingerboard had a couple of little chips and dents, plus a few specks of white paint you would normally see on a builder's transistor radio. None of which will have the slightest impact on playability or tone, however, but it did make TG feel a bit like we had been given a dirty fork in a restaurant.

As for tonewoods, the realists among you will have guessed that it's laminate woods all

the way in this price bracket. That's not the end of the world, though, especially when you consider that the EG260C has a spruce top and mahogany body, with mahogany forming the basis of the neck and a strip of rosewood making up the fingerboard. The chrome tuners also look smart (although they haven't got the smoothest action we've ever felt), while the presence of a TP-4 preamp with three sliding EQs and a Gain knob suggests that we should be able to dig out a workable tone at the very least.

That said, an acoustic guitar should be able to perform without the help of Jim Marshall, so for the moment we're strumming with just the EG260C's natural response for amplification. Despite claims of its finger-picking prowess (which is admittedly pretty good), we actually felt this guitar's strongest suit was pounding through chords with a light pick. It's got a great jangle and plenty of sparkle, and it should power a small jam session along

nicely without the need for accompaniment. OK, so we can't pretend this guitar has the kind of heart-stopping raw tone that will breathe new life into your old riffs or make you sit in spellbound silence after pushing through an open G chord, but it's far more than competent and retains a hint of the more expensive Takamine models.

Plugging in always covers a multitude of sins, and in this case the TP-4 preamp can either be used to complement or combat the sonic properties of the woods. To start up the basic tone (which starts out as a louder

"Cheap guitars are the lifeblood of rock 'n' roll, and they don't come much cheaper than the EG260C... a comfortable workhorse guitar with bags of amplified character"

version of what you get unplugged), TG soon found ourselves sprinkling reverb into the equation, easing up the mid-range, adding more bass and even exploring what it would sound like with just a hint of delay. This is the real joy of the electro-acoustic format: you can have a bit of fun with your sound instead of being defined by your tonewoods and tied to one sound. Of course, it also makes discussing the tone of the EG260C a slightly open-ended question. Whether it's jangly, bassy or thudding depends on where your amp and preamp dials are pointing.

Inevitably, the option of amping this guitar also makes the physical playing experience much more expressive. With every squeak of every string relayed by individual piezo pickups beneath the bridge, you start to capture the kind of nuances (vibrato, for instance) that are lost in the mire when you play the EG260C *au naturel*. It all serves to cement the impression that this guitar should be plugged in whenever humanly possible and only played without an amp during a power cut.

The Takamine EG260C might not be a world-beater in the electro-acoustic market,

Takamine's G-Series guitars have always offered great value for money



The TP-4 preamp maintains Takamine's awesome reputation for great sounding pickup systems

but you would be extremely naive to think it would be at this price. Instead, it's a solidly built, comfortable workhorse guitar with bags of amplified character and a name on the headstock that you can be proud of. And for £239, can you really argue with that?

FOR: Cracking price and solid performance

AGAINST: You couldn't quite call it 'aspirational', though...

TG RATING:



TAKAMINE EG440SC

Just as there are degrees of wealth, so there are degrees of poverty. Takamine realise this. That's why the G-Series works on a 'sliding scale', starting out with models like the aforementioned EG260C, then creeping up in increments to the more expensive instruments from Korea (beyond that, you're out of the G-zone and into Japanese prices). At £299, the Takamine EG440SC resides somewhere in the middle. You might describe it as a guitar for someone who's lying in the gutter but looking at the stars.

This electro-acoustic looks very different to the EG260C and that's less to do with the natural finish than the body shape. In this

case, we're looking at a cutaway example of the 'NEX' – a signature Takamine body shape that has a rounded top profile, a narrow waist and a rounded bottom like those ladies in the hip-hop videos. We're told that the dimensions of the soundboard should give a balanced response over the bass, treble and midrange, and that's exactly what you want from an acoustic. The cutaway meets the fretboard just a little higher than the EG260C

"The EG440SC is a truly gorgeous guitar from top to toe and more than justifies squeezing your parents' bank account for the additional £60"

too, implying that access to the upper frets should be as good if not better.

So what else does the additional 60 quid get you? For starters, a far neater finish. From the fretboard to the soundhole, there is very little to criticise here in the construction stakes. Although, once again, we did find the gold tuners gave a slightly jerky adjustment of pitch. Otherwise, the time we spent with the EG440SC didn't reveal any hidden nasties and, quite frankly, you would expect nothing less when you throw 300 sheets at a firm like Takamine.

More important than the finish are the raw materials. TG wasn't surprised to discover that the EG440SC's back and sides are made from laminate mahogany (you

don't actually start seeing solid bodies until you get a little higher up the price range), but we were pleased to find a solid spruce soundboard on this model. Inevitably, using fewer chunks of tonewood produces a more even and responsive sound than a plywood mash-up and should make a marked difference to the EG440SC's performance. The neck and fingerboard are less exciting, following the usual mahogany/rosewood format on virtually every G-Series model.

Finally, in the spec stakes we were delighted to clock a swanked-up preamp in the form of the TP-4T (the additional 'T' refers to a chromatic tuner that tells you to tighten or slacken via a small LED screen). We're hoping it shouldn't take much tweaking to dig out a decent sound.

The moment you play a chord on the EG440SC you can tell the quality has gone up a couple of notches. Despite the larger body size, this was a tighter playing experience than many of the acoustics we have tried in this sort of price bracket and instantly offered a more 'compressed' unamplified tone that doesn't let the bass swamp the sonic spectrum or allow the treble to cut your throat. For once, TG would actually agree with the manufacturer's blurb. This is a supremely balanced instrument that lets the quality of the spruce and mahogany shine. It also complements its tone with an enjoyable fretboard and neck profile – we didn't really think about what our fretting hand was doing, and that's always a good sign.

Sometimes TG plugs in an electro-acoustic in the hope that we can sort out its raw tone with a bit of EQ action. In this instance, we plugged in the EG440SC in the hope that its gorgeous unamplified tone wouldn't be lost somewhere between the piezo pickups and amp speakers. Fortunately, it wasn't. If you want to stick to the blueprint, simply set your levels at half-mast and get strumming. If you would prefer a bit more bass or added bite, it's easy enough to do that too. The critical point is that wherever you set the EQ, you will always hear the subtle flavour of the tonewoods working hard beneath the surface. We guess you could say that it gives this guitar a real sense of identity.

As with the EG260C, the other major benefit of plugging in is the increased level of subtlety. Moving bass notes, trills and ghost notes were all noted and conveyed to the amp, encouraging us to play with panache. The only downside is when you unplug and go play in the park. Despite the EG440SC's physical comfort, TG couldn't help feeling like Superman without his powers.

Theoretically, this review isn't a competition between these two Takamine guitars. But it's inevitable that when you play two similarly-priced instruments back-to-back you're going to find a favourite. Having said that, it should be fairly clear from what we've said that you're looking at our favourite guitar of the pair. The EG440SC is a gorgeous guitar from top to toe and more than justifies squeezing your parents' bank account for the additional £60.

FOR: Real character to the tone and great attention to detail

AGAINST: Tuners are a bit jumpy

TG RATING:



INFORMATION

ORIGIN: China
TOP: Solid spruce
BODY/SIDES: Mahogany (laminate)
NECK: Mahogany
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood, with abalone dots
FRETS: 20
HARDWARE: Gold tuners
PREAMP: TP-4T
GIGBAG: No
LEFT-HANDER: No
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