

## FIRST PLAY



**TAYLOR ACADEMY 12E-N**  
£799

WHAT IS IT? 12-fret non-cutaway nylon string electro from Taylor's entry-level Academy range



**LA PATRIE ARENA CW Q.1T**  
£469

12-fret cutaway thinline nylon string electro from the Godin brand La Patrie's new stage-aimed Arena series

# Classic Lines

If you're looking to find your nylon string voice, take a look at these 'entry level' guitars from Mexico and Canada

**Words** Dave Burrluck **Photography** Olly Curtis

**T**aylor Academy's proposition is proper guitars for – in Taylor terms – not a lot of money: making the “acoustic guitar accessible to more players”. This nylon string is also, by design, aimed at the younger starter player. It might be entry level in terms of Taylor's range but, not least in this nylon electro form, it's hardly low-end with serious competition from the likes of Yamaha and Cordoba, who have 'posher' spec'd nylon electros at the same, or lower, price-points.

Another example would be La Patrie – made by Godin in Canada, who have taken the wraps off a new four-strong Arena mini-range priced £469-£799. While our model doesn't include a gigbag like the Taylor it's well-spec'd and much lower in price.

Taylor's smallest full-scale shape, the Grand Concert, is the perfect size for a 'classical' nylon-string. The 12e-N falls, slightly, into the 'crossover' style, not least with its ES-N undersaddle and small-footprint basic preamp, lightly cambered fingerboard and relatively narrow neck. That said, its full depth and non-







cutaway style, not to mention its dot inlaid fingerboard, makes it look more like a 00/000 with the ‘wrong’ strings. In typical Taylor style, however, its build is as clean as a whistle.

The satin varnish finish is about as thin as it gets which will no doubt enhance its resonance though it provides little protection; the back of the mahogany neck (with separate head and heel block) and the sapele veneers have an almost open-pore textural feel. We do get an adjustable truss rod – not part of traditional classics – and strap buttons on both heel and base, the latter doubling as the output jack which is firmly screwed in place. Along with the classical-style tuners, the tie-block bridge is classy; the slightly compensated Tusq saddle angled back to ensure good down pressure over the under-saddle transducer. Fretting too is superbly consistent.

Augmenting a comprehensive range of ‘student’ nylon strings, that start at £429, the La Patrie Arena CW Q1T models are all stage-aimed thinline electro cutaways. La Patrie’s

Plugged in the Taylor is crisp, balanced and with a low end that won’t run away with you

build is very sharp, again satin finished with a wide-grained solid spruce top and laminate wild cherry back and sides stained a reddish-brown. Though lightly arched, the back is braced, while the top is fan braced.

Unlike the Taylor, the La Patrie has a more classical width at the nut although the actual string spacing is virtually identical. The headstock adopts the longer Godin Multiac style with a rosewood facing over a whiter veneer and in true classical style there’s no brand logo.

Along with its cutaway, we get the standard 19 frets – the Taylor has 17 – but the major difference between our models is the thinline body that reduces the depth of the sound chamber and is designed to reduce feedback. Its more electric-like feel is enhanced by the shoulder-placed strap button (Schaller locking) while the lower button doubles as the output jack.

### Sounds & Feel

It’s the body depth that creates the primary difference in feel: the La Patrie is really comfortable, akin to a small electric semi or thinline. If you already play nylon string then you may feel more at home with the La Patrie’s neck with its slightly fuller shoulder and flatter back. The Taylor neck isn’t much smaller, but

1. The Taylor's petite body size, slightly cambered neck and position markers move it away from the traditional classical design
2. Typically for a 'crossover' style nylon string the nut width is smaller than a concert classical guitar. That said, the string spacing maximises the width and is virtually identical to the string spacing of the La Patrie which comes with a wider neck
3. An armrest on a guitar at this price is a bit unusual, but it certainly adds some comfort for your right forearm when playing the Taylor
4. The elegant soundhole of the La Patrie is overhung by the fretboard, which may make fitting a feedback-suppressing bung difficult. The thinline body is superbly comfortable though



with more tapered shoulders it feels less bulky and more steel-string-like.

Both necks follow the classical protocol of joining the body at the 12th fret. This does limit high fret access compared to a 14-fret, especially on the non-cut Taylor, which also has its strap button on the heel with a sharp boatlike bow that affects the upper fret feel.

The thicker but lower tension strings are high off the 'board compared to a steel string too. The Taylor is set a shade under 3mm on the trebles and bang on 3mm on the bass side. The Godin goes higher, approx. 3.5mm on the treble side and 4mm on the bass. Along with thicker diameter treble strings these subtleties all add up to a tougher feel on the La Patrie.

Playing acoustically the thinner bodied La Patrie holds its own. Yes, there's a little more low-end colour and a slightly crisper high end on the Taylor compared to the La Patrie's more fundamental character with slightly less attack to the high end. The Taylor's voice is more classical with a more open midrange; hit hard it has an almost flamenco-like character yet played in a more relaxed Latin-style its voicing allows clear representation of the often complex jazzier chords of that genre. A hard pick attack seems to work best for the strong more fundamental voice of the La Patrie; in contrast the Taylor offers a little more snap.



Inspired by Godin's unique Multiac series, the headstock here adds some modern class. Nuts on both guitars are made from Graph Tech's Tusq

Tuners – machineheads and the onboard digital tuner – work efficiently on both. The latter is extremely handy on a nylon string, as they take more time to settle to consistent pitch compared to steel.

Plugged in the differences continue but, bearing in mind the price, they are narrowed. We really can't fault the Taylor; it is crisp, balanced and with a low end that won't run away with you. The La Patrie, with a slight mid cut (by boosting the bass and treble and knocking back the volume) is similar but annoyingly the high E is underpowered and the G string a little hot.

Onstage you might rely on a floor tuner or outboard preamps, which suits the simplistic Taylor, while the La Patrie's dual band EQ would probably suit an open-mic night. Neither guitar has either a phase switch or notch filter to combat feedback and while the Taylor's soundhole is circular and will take a soundhole bung, the La Patrie's soundhole is truncated by the base of the fingerboard and finding one to fit might be a problem.

## Verdict

There are very few negatives. The La Patrie is aimed more at the performing musician although its thinline concept makes it a seriously comfortable couch noodler, a great recording/songwriting and practice tool. It's a shame about the unbalanced electro output.

The more all round Taylor does edge it in terms of neck shape, size, playability and comes with a slightly crisper, defined voicing. It comes at a price though, bringing in some serious competition.

As ever, if you're new to the parallel universe of the nylon string: play as many as you can and find your fit. **G**



## TAYLOR ACADEMY 12E-N

**PRICE:** £779 (inc gigbag)  
**ORIGIN:** Mexico  
**TYPE:** Grand Concert nylon string  
**TOP:** Solid Lutz spruce  
**BACK/SIDES:** Layered sapele  
**MAX RIM DEPTH:** 103mm  
**MAX BODY WIDTH:** 383mm  
**NECK:** Mahogany  
**SCALE LENGTH:** 648mm  
**TUNERS:** Classical style 3-a-side nickel-plated w/ pearloid buttons  
**NUT/WIDTH:** Tusq/47.8mm  
**FINGERBOARD:** Ebony, dot inlays, light radius  
**FRETS:** 17, small  
**BRIDGE/SPACING:** Ebony w/ compensated Tusq saddle/56mm  
**ELECTRICS:** Taylor ES-N system w/ under-saddle transducer; side mounted preamp (tuner, volume and tone)  
**WEIGHT (kg/lb):** 1.94/4.26  
**OPTIONS:** All acoustic 12-N costs £659  
**RANGE OPTIONS:** Cutaway 214ce-N (£1,199)  
**LEFT-HANDERS:** Yes  
**FINISHES:** Natural – satin varnish

Taylor Guitars  
 +31 20 667 6030  
[www.taylorguitars.com](http://www.taylorguitars.com)

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**PROS** Typically precise Taylor design and build; crisp classical-style voicing, excellent plugged in

**CONS** Basic preamp and almost overly austere construction, especially considering the price



## LA PATRIE ARENA CW Q1T

**PRICE:** £469  
**ORIGIN:** Canada  
**TYPE:** Thinline cutaway nylon  
**BACK/SIDES:** Wild cherry laminate  
**MAX RIM DEPTH:** 70mm  
**MAX BODY WIDTH:** 376mm  
**NECK:** Mahogany  
**SCALE LENGTH:** 650mm  
**TUNERS:** Classical style 3-a-side, nickel-plated w/ pearloid buttons  
**NUT/WIDTH:** Tusq/51.42mm  
**FINGERBOARD:** Rosewood, side dots only, light radius  
**FRETS:** 19, small  
**BRIDGE/SPACING:** Rosewood w/ compensated Tusq saddle/56.5mm  
**ELECTRICS:** Godin Q1T system w/ under-saddle transducer; side mounted preamp (tuner, volume, treble and bass)  
**WEIGHT (kg/lb):** 1.79/3.94  
**OPTIONS:** None.  
**RANGE OPTIONS:** The Arena Flame Maple (£749) and Pro (£799)  
**LEFT-HANDERS:** Check Concert Q1 (£649) and Etude Q1 (£569)  
**FINISHES:** Natural top, stained back and sides – semi-gloss

440 Distribution  
 01132 589599  
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**PROS:** Sharp build, modern thinline design, dual-band onboard EQ and overall good value

**CONS:** Slightly unbalanced string outputs, set-up could be better for the style