

Signing In...

A tribute to a guitar Tommy Emmanuel has used in the studio for 20 years, the Larrivée C-03R-TE combines understated good looks with a captivating tone

Words David Mead Photography Neil Godwin



LARRIVÉE C-03R-TE CUSTOM £2,699

CONTACT 440 PHONE 0113 2379658 WEB www.larrivee.com

What You Need To Know

1

Isn't Tommy a Maton endorsee?

Indeed he is. Tommy has been using his Maton TE Series guitars live on stage for many years. The story with the Larrivée C-03R-TE Custom began around 20 years ago when Jean Larrivée built Tommy a custom C-10 12-fretter, which has featured on many of TE's recordings and is an instrument he still uses today. The C-03R-TE is a tribute to the original, designed via a collaboration between Tommy and Jean Larrivée.

2

So, he has two signature models?

Tommy is a man of many signature guitars, almost exclusively Maton. The current series extends to five models: the EBG808TE, the cutaway version EBG808TEC, the dreadnought TE1 as well as the TE Personal and EMTE Mini models. He also has his own signature version of the AER Compact 60, which includes his own choice of delay and reverb settings!

3

Larrivée is based in Canada, right?

No, the company used to be based in Canada – in fact, they've moved around quite a bit, from humble beginnings in Toronto in the late 60s and 70s through to Victoria in 1977 and then Vancouver in 1983. In 2001 the company relocated to the US, in Oxnard, California, where it has remained to this day.

We've often pondered over the exact value of signature models during idle chit-chat here at *Guitarist*. After all, nobody is daft enough to believe buying a replica of so-and-so's guitar will immediately bestow an additional helping of talent upon the new owner. So what exactly is the appeal? If you want to play like Clapton, surely dedicated and enduring practice will be a far better vehicle than shelling out for a lookalike instrument? And it has to be said that signature models usually have a premium price tag attached as part of the deal.

We concluded that you're probably talking 'ballpark' here. If you find yourself holding an instrument with all the onboard refinements and finery that an artist with decades of experience has requested, perhaps – just perhaps – you might be able to hitch a ride and pursue your own musical ambitions having had a bit of a leg-up. Alternatively, it might just feel like you're wearing your shoes on the wrong feet. A good fit can never be guaranteed when projecting one person's ideal six-string squeeze on your own level of ability and playing skills after all.



Each C-03R-TE label features Tommy's handwritten signature



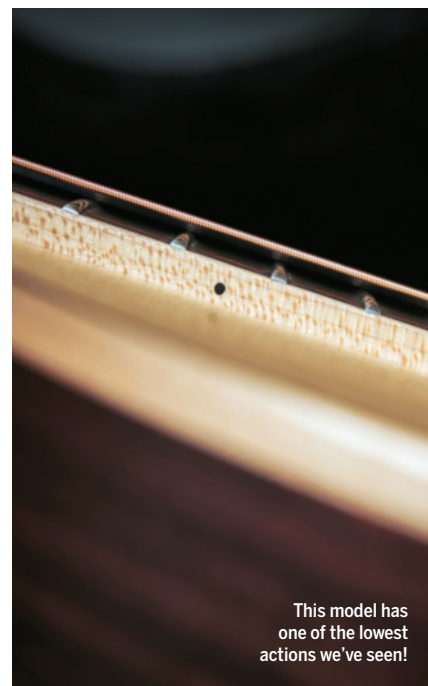
Larrivée embossed tuners sit atop a mahogany neck

As far as master acoustic picker Tommy Emmanuel is concerned, the majority of his signature models are lodged with the Australia-based Maton company, using woods indigenous to Oz in the process. These days, if you see a picture of Tommy on stage, the likelihood is that you'll be looking down the barrel of his trusty Maton EBG808TE, his touring companion for many years. So how does this Larrivée fit into the picture, exactly? And is it an actual signature model? After all, the word 'tribute' used in Larrivée's description of the instrument kind of alludes to the fact that what we have here today isn't an exact modelling of the guitar back in Tommy's lock-up but a model that shares some of its design spec while aiming to have its own space in the acoustic-guitar marketplace. So, it's a case of thumbpicks at dawn as we unbox the C-03R-TE Custom and pursue our enquiries...

Feel & Sounds

You have to look closely before you see any reference to this guitar being anything to do with Tommy at all. Take a squint through the soundhole and there's TE's John Hancock on the label within. But apart from that, no-one would know. The other thing we noticed is that the action on this guitar is one of the lowest we've seen in a while on an acoustic that has come our way (with the exception of the recent Martin SC-13E). This is possibly one of Tommy's own design requests as he has the action on his Matons unfeasibly low, too.

How do we know? Well, when we had Tommy down at our studio to do some filming a couple of years back he handed us his Maton and upon seeing that there was barely a hair's breadth between the 12th fret and the bass E string we exclaimed, "Blimey, Tommy, couldn't you get the action any lower?" to which the maestro



This model has one of the lowest actions we've seen!

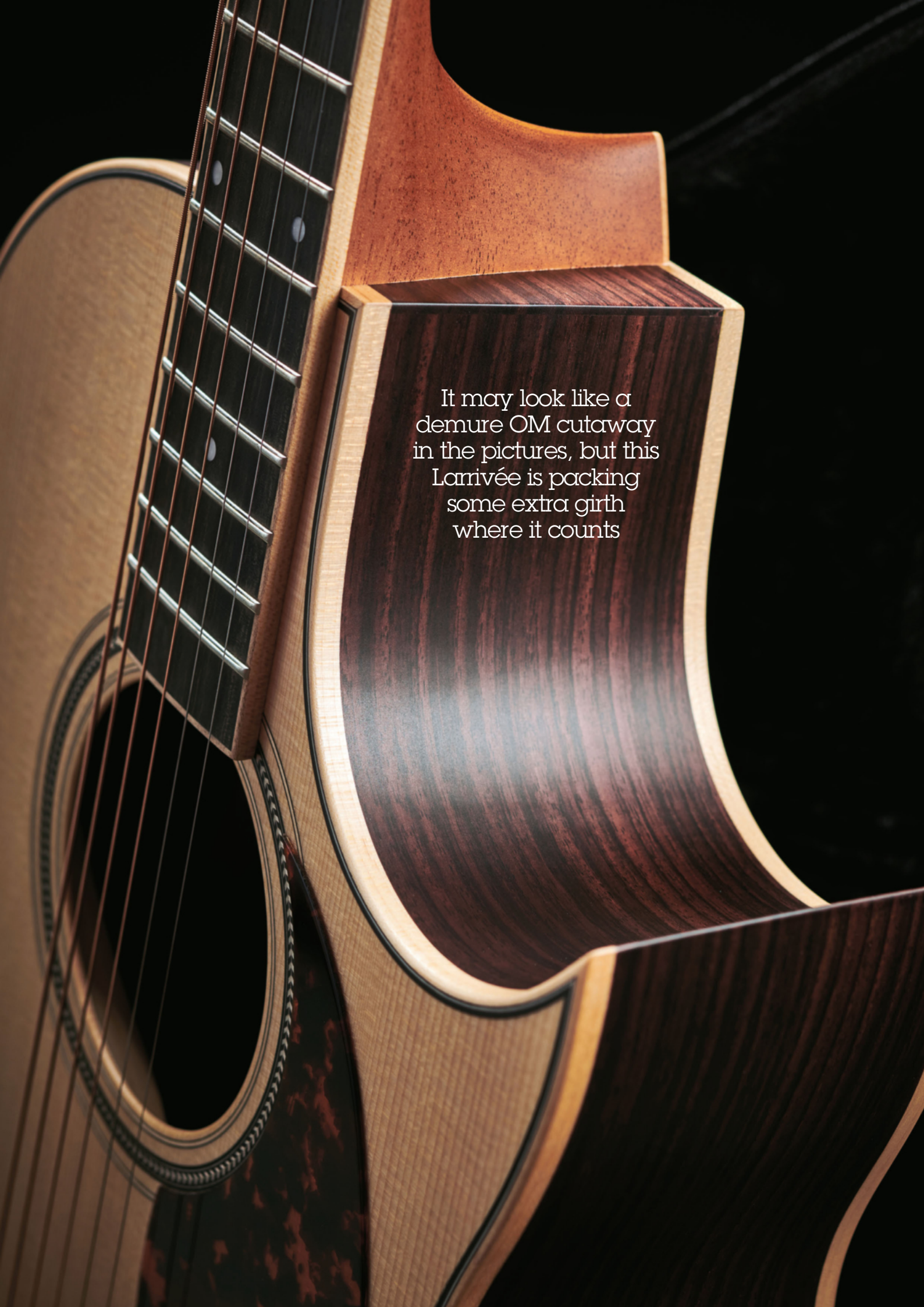
THE RIVALS

If you want to stick to the Tommy Emmanuel signature route, Maton has a whole range available; Tommy's mainstay is his Maton EBG808TE, which you'll find at around £2,169. Martin's OMC-35E, found streeting at £3,199, adds a good few hundred to the price but comes stage-ready with a Fishman Aura VT Enhance pickup installed. Fellow US acoustic big hitter Taylor has the 512CE V-Class waiting in the wings at £2,499, while Gibson's Montana Songwriter offers a bit of dreadnought kapow at £2,499.

deadpanned, "No, I like it high..." We measured the Larrivée's action at 3.1mm at the 12th fret on the bass and a smidge lower at the treble side. And, as far as we could hear from an exploratory trip up the fretboard, it's immaculately fretbuzz free.

While we've still got our trusty measuring tool in our hands, it's worth noting that the lower bout on the Larrivée comes in at a very generous 406mm (16 inches), making it about as wide as a jumbo at the blunt end. That's wider than a Martin dreadnought and yet the C-03R-TE looks perfectly well proportioned sitting on a stand before us. It may look like a demure OM cutaway in the pictures, but this Larrivée is packing some extra girth where it counts.

We've learned that this guitar is based on one that Jean Larrivée built for Tommy 20 years ago – a C-10, to be precise – and one that Tommy uses in the studio. The full story of the original guitar's use is detailed

A close-up, artistic photograph of an acoustic guitar. The focus is on the upper body and neck. The guitar features a light-colored spruce top with a subtle grain pattern. The back and sides are made of a dark, rich wood, likely rosewood, with a prominent vertical grain. The neck is also made of a light wood, possibly maple, with a dark fretboard and silver frets. The bridge is visible, showing a tortoiseshell pickguard. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the curves and textures of the wood against a dark background.

It may look like a
demure OM cutaway
in the pictures, but this
Lorrivée is packing
some extra girth
where it counts



1. The depth of the Florentine cutaway ensures easy access to the guitar's 17 frets

2. The C-03R-TE features the same recipe of body woods found on Tommy's original C-10

This impressive beast can take on a variety of styles with all the aplomb of a seasoned performer

in the interview on p98, but a quick check on prices reveals that ordering a C-10 today, you'd be paying almost twice the price asked for the C-03R: another interesting turn of events in the signature model debate we referred to earlier.

Glancing through the spec sheet we find that the C-03R has a Sitka spruce top, which is still very new and fresh-faced on our review sample, with Indian rosewood back and sides. The body has been satin finished with maple binding to the top and back edges – and just look at the depth of the Florentine cutaway. To offer some perspective, we measure its depth as being 103mm (four inches) and so access to the upper frets is never going to be a problem. There's a one-piece mahogany neck that's topped with a maple-bound ebony fingerboard, bone nut and bridge saddle with what looks to us like impeccable workmanship throughout.

You certainly get the impression that Larrivée is intent on offering a premium quality ride with this machine with no corners cut in the process.

What's it like to sit and play? With the generous width to that lower bout, a 648mm (25.5-inch) scale length and 12-fret-to-the-body design, everything looks – and feels – in perfect proportion. The slinky action makes everything from casual strumming to more vigorous fingerstyle an absolute breeze to the extent that it's very easy to become lost in the TE Custom's charms.

Naturally, it's still pretty much a bench-fresh instrument and won't deliver its full potential until it has some miles on the clock. In fact, we found that the sound noticeably improved over the week or so it was on trial. Whereas at first, newly unboxed, the sound was tentative and slightly treble biased, after a few days the



LARRIVÉE C-03R-TE CUSTOM

PRICE: £2,699 (inc case)

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: 0000 12-fret cutaway

TOP: Sitka spruce

BACK/SIDES: Indian rosewood

MAX RIM DEPTH: 121mm

MAX BODY WIDTH: 406mm

NECK: Mahogany

SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")

TUNERS: Larrivée

NUT/WIDTH: 44.45mm

FINGERBOARD: Ebony

FRETS: 17

BRIDGE/SPACING: Bone/57.1mm

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 9.92/4.5

OPTIONS: None

RANGE OPTIONS: Tommy's tribute model is based around the Larrivée C-10 12-fret (£4,699)

LEFT-HANDERS: Yes

FINISH: Satin

bass and midrange both began to wake up and add their voices to the overall sound picture and we gained a better idea of what this guitar is going to sound like in the future. It's loud, too – that added bulk to the lower bout kicking in and adding an impressive dynamic range.

Played softly with the fingers the guitar responds with ballad-friendly richness. Strummed with a pick and you'd be easily convinced that you had a dreadnought in your hands but without the midrange lumpiness that sometimes accompanies those hardy acoustic perennials. Strap on a thumbpick for some Chet Atkins or Tommy-style action and the chunk and power is everything it needs to be – this is a seriously impressive beast in that it can take on a variety of styles with all the aplomb of a seasoned performer and vanquish all with effortless ease. We like what we're hearing. A lot.

Verdict

As we've said, signature models generally tend to be someone else's idea of perfection and rarely turn out to be for the everyman. But Larrivée and Tommy have managed to pull off something quite extraordinary with the C-03R-TE Custom. Its virtues include the fact that it's not silly money when you take into account the level of workmanship on display here, neither is it stuck in a rut as far as musical styles are concerned. It doesn't make demands on the player, tacitly insisting that if you don't play like Tommy you're not welcome here. It's an all-rounder that would ably provide a noble chordal accompaniment to a singer-songwriter, and if you wanted to venture on to the instrumental acoustic stage it would be your best buddy there. We were impressed, and if you like what you see here, we think you will be, too. **G**



9/10

PROS A wonderfully realised no-nonsense 12-fretter with a foot in many stylistic camps

CONS All we can think of is that 14-fret-to-the-body devotees may run out of fretboard, but we're being almost comically picky here