

TAKAMINE EF440SCGN, ETN10-C, EF341SC & TF740FS \$762, £1,021, \$1,021 & £1,679
ELECTRO-ACOUSTICS





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Takamine's stage-ready acoustics have been around for more than 40 years. Here are four examples that will back you up faithfully at any open mic night *by Steve Harvey*

As the acoustic world goes, Takamine's list of endorsees and users is one of the most impressive. It's only equalled or surpassed by the big boys: Martin, Taylor and Gibson. Be it in the hands of Bruce Springsteen, Noel Gallagher, Jon Bon Jovi, Glenn Frey, Steve Harley or super-picker Brad Davis, Takamine guitars can be found at gigs both major and minor all around the world.

In recent months, Takamine has launched new models as well as upgraded and updated established ones within its extensive catalogue. We've selected four electros that not only span the range, but are also proportionally representative of Takamine as a brand.

The first three of our quartet come supplied with a snug-fitting, high-quality hard-shell Takamine branded case. The more expensive TF740FS model comes with an upgraded, luxury case, which includes a shoulder strap and a larger inner compartment that provides a long sculpted cradle for almost the entire length of the neck. Generally speaking, it

bodes well when a guitar is worthy of such protection, so Takamine obviously feels the FS model is a little bit special... but more on that later.

EF440SCGN

First up is an all-new model, launched at this year's Winter NAMM show. Slotting into the Nouveau Series, the EF440SCGN is an effort by Takamine to offer consumers a lower priced entry point into the 'Pro' series. At first glance it looks like an all-mahogany model. While this is a correct assumption for the two-piece back and sides, it is in fact a cedar top guitar, finished with a vintage stain – and very eye-catching it is too. The all-over matt satin finish gives a natural, earthy look that augments the simple, minimal appointments.

The body shape is Takamine's own NEX design, which aims to bridge the gap between the power and clout of jumbos and the responsive, delicate nature of smaller-bodied instruments. Though measuring nearly 400mm (15.5-inches) across the lower bout, the angle and positioning of the waist ensure

that the EF440SCGN remains a comfortable and non-bulky guitar to play. The unbound, two-piece mahogany neck is a slim 'C' profile and, when combined with the satin finish, makes this a slick, smooth playing experience.

Build quality and presentation are commendable. Joints are tight with no evidence of retro-filling and the guitar's innards are as clean as the proverbial whistle. Though somewhat understated in terms of embellishments, the

EF440SCGN is still a stylish guitar with contemporary lines set to appeal to the modern acoustic player.

Onboard electrics come in the form of the now-familiar CT-4B preamp with three-band EQ, volume and chromatic tuner. The control panel is simplicity itself with four sliders and a tuner-on button, which doubles up as a mute when engaged. In what is a clever touch, the CT-4B is capable of being calibrated to frequencies other than the standard A440.

The rivals

EF440SCGN

Tanglewood's TW47B

(£629) is a punchy, all-mahogany super folk model fitted with the B-Band A3T pickup system. If funds will stretch a little further, the Yamaha CPX900 (£802) is a superb smaller-bodied electro fitted with the three-way ART pickup system.



Looks like mahogany from afar? The top here is in fact solid cedar



The rivals

ETN10-C & EF341SC

Lakewood's D14 CP (£1,280) is a beautifully made cutaway dread built with an AAA European spruce top, mahogany back and sides and maple binding. For those wanting to keep the budget sub-£1,000, the **Freshman FA400DCES** (£999) is a highly impressive electro featuring a AAA Engelmann spruce top, Indian rosewood back and sides. Canadian maple binding and the stunning Schertler Bluestick onboard electronic wizardry.

ETN10-C

Takamine's Advanced Natural series has, for some time, been the 'bread and butter' of the range, providing the foundation upon which other series are built. Central to that range is the ETN10-C, which was launched in September 2009. In an effort to update the series, the ETN10-C features some design changes when compared to previous models. These include stylish, small dot fretboard markers where previously there were none, a striking ovangkol and rosewood soundhole rosette and chrome-plated hardware instead of the previous gold.

In many ways, the ETN10-C is the archetypal modern

cutaway electro dreadnought – an uncomplicated, well-made model with capable electrics and bags of boom onboard. Tonewoods used include a deceptively blonde, book-matched cedar top, sapele back and sides and a rosewood fingerboard. The hefty rosewood bridge (measuring 7mm at its thickest point) features a through-string arrangement where the bridge pins are rendered unnecessary, facilitating straightforward string changing – even onstage mid-gig if required. As with the high-end model on review here, the ETN10-C features a split, two-piece saddle that's designed to achieve near-perfect intonation.

The ETN10-C's external finish is excellent, though the inside gives evidence of a couple of minor lapses in quality control. We notice that the inner paper label is beginning to peel and there are traces of smeared glue. This won't bother some, but it's a shame because in so many other respects Takamine's finish and presentation is flawless.

The recent upgrades have undoubtedly turned the ETN10-C into a more desirable, contemporary guitar that will have broad appeal.

EF341SC

The EF341SC comes from the Keystone series. If you get the feeling that you've seen this



The pin-free bridge design makes string changes a doddle, but traditionalists argue that a pinned bridge sounds better



guitar before, you probably have. Underlining its credentials as a top electro, the EF341SC is the acoustic choice of Messers Springsteen and Bon Jovi.

Though not being a fan of colour finishes, this reviewer has to confess to having fallen a little in love. The deep black gloss finish is as good as we've seen for a very long time and we particularly like the classy inlaid fretboard markers as set into the rosewood fingerboard.

Concentric white circles make up the soundhole rosette, which in turn matches with the black and white coach-lining used on both the guitar's top and bottom as well as the back centre strip. The slim-profile neck is edge bound, as is the slim headstock.

Beneath the sumptuous finish, tonewoods employed include cedar for the top, maple for the back and sides and rosewood for the bridge. As with all other models on review here, a strap button is fitted to the underside of the neck heel, further underscoring that Takamine expects these guitars to be played onstage.

Disappointingly, we again found signs of some sloppy quality control when inspecting the innards of the guitar: excess glue seeping out from the kerfling and what looks like small splashes of white paint around the paper label mark down what would otherwise be high praise for this model. These issues aside, the EF341SC is an extremely likeable guitar, set up in every way for stage use.



The CT-4B CoolTube preamp looks bulky by modern standards but sounds great, no question

The high-quality materials and superb factory set-up add up to a guitar that's dangerously addictive to play

TF740FS

And now for something completely different: again launched earlier this year, the TF740FS slots into Takamine's flagship Tradesman series, which is designed to excel in specific disciplines. As the FS denotes, the TF740FS is an out-and-out fingerstyle guitar with super-wide neck, healthy string spacing and 12-fret neck-to-body joint.

Straight out of the case, the TF740FS exudes a regal, stately

aura that will appeal to acoustic connoisseurs and collectors alike. A gorgeous selection of cedar, with a strong, creamy-flecked grain, has been used for the top while a high grade of mahogany makes the back and sides. The elegant OM lines are augmented by an abalone, inlaid soundhole rosette.

Again, a two-piece saddle sits within a rosewood bridge and at the other end, in what is a very classy touch, the sculpting to the headstock reveals the

laminated mahogany and rosewood that face the slotted headstock on which sit side-mounted, open-g geared Gotoh tuning machines.

The compelling mix of the generous string spacing, the high quality materials and superb factory set-up all add up to a guitar that's dangerously addictive to play. The TF740FS draws you in, holds your attention and makes you want to play longer and better. This is a grown-up's guitar.



Guitarist CHOICE

The rivals

TF740FS

Both **Taylor's 312CE** (£1,259) and **412CE** (£1,479) models make desirable rivals here. The 312 is a spruce/sapele guitar, while the 412 features ovankol for the back and sides. Both models feature Venetian cutaways and Taylor's own Expression System. Alternatively, the **Larrivee OM-03E** (£1,263) is a beautifully appointed OM fitted with the LR Baggs Element pickup, albeit without a cutaway.

Sounds

In line with its appearance, the EF440SCGN offers a dry, woody tone that's very well-suited to punchy chord and riff work. With a medium pick in hand, first-position and barre chords produce a mid-heavy timbre suitable for many applications, though the lack of a pronounced bass means that fingerstyle isn't one of them. Single-note runs and solos are clear and carry good presence and sustain, however.

The ETN10-C's tone is instantly recognisable as a dreadnought, with lots of volume, presence and a strong lower-mid-range that's excellent for hearty strummed chord work. You could perhaps accuse the ETN10-C of lacking some warmth and character, but we'd suggest that the guitar's dry clarity and punch



The EF440SCGN's slot headstock sets it apart from the rest

The TF740FS really is something different with a clear, open, bright yet totally soulful output

will be just what many gigging singer-songwriters require for underpinning vocals.

Although being a similar guitar to the ETN10-C in many ways, the EF341SC offers a noticeably different tone to its

dreadnought stablemate. Its volume and sustain levels are similar to its brother, but the EF341SC has more heart to its timbre. The bass is richer while the mids have a smoother presence that gives more tonal

The Bottom Line

Takamine EF440SCGN

We like: Price; modern looks
We dislike: A little lacking in tonal versatility
Guitarist says: An affordable yet well-built electro suitable for a range of stage work

Takamine ETN10-C

We like: Simple, uncomplicated aesthetics
We dislike: Minor quality control niggles; cost
Guitarist says: A modern, capable dread perfect for open-mic nights and home recording sessions

Takamine EF341SC

We like: Sumptuous, stylish looks; gutsy, rich tone
We dislike: Only the not too clean inside of the guitar
Guitarist says: A super gig-ready electro fit for any stage

Takamine TF740FS

We like: Body shape; materials; balanced tone; electronics; just about everything really!
We dislike: There's no non-cutaway version
Guitarist says: A real player's guitar that will only get better with age

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versatility, depending on the different styles or techniques that you play. In fact, we'd suggest that the EF341SC is one of the most likeable tones for a £1,000 dread we've heard for some time.

Finally, the TF740FS: as mentioned, this guitar really is something different with a clear, open, bright yet totally soulful output. The increased depth of the body makes for a very plump but tight bass register too. The TF740FS is not a guitar that needs to be driven; it's superbly responsive and very little effort is required to benefit from its huge

dynamic range. Sorry, Takamine, we might just need to hold on to this one for ongoing evaluation!

The strong, sturdy tonal characteristics of the CoolTube CT-4B preamp will be well-known to regular readers of this magazine. Takamines are built for the stage and the no-nonsense CT-4B is a well-proven preamp that's fitted to a large section of its range, providing a versatile, clear and heady output suitable for just about every plugged-in situation you'll find yourself in.

Our TF740FS, however, employs the CoolTube CT-P2

preamp. Previous pages of this magazine will bear witness to our being impressed with this high-output system. The effect on the tone when dialling in the CoolTube is quite dramatic and it is capable of mixing in varying degrees of warmth. Push it hard and you might even enjoy a hint of overdrive! The CT-P2 is a highly respected unit, used by professionals and amateurs alike – it's a perfect complement to what is a very fine guitar.

Verdict

Takamine guitars have a distinct, clean tone that's

uniquely their own and we found it hard not to be rather impressed by them. A few minor issues with our dreadnoughts aside, presentation is good and the guitars are certainly built with life on the road in mind. The onboard preamps are excellent and with the differing body shapes, finishes and price points, Takamine has a lot to offer the gigging/recording musician – as the man famously born in the USA would no doubt testify. If you're looking for a serious stage guitar, Takamine remains an excellent place to start your search. **G**



EF440SCGN

PRICE: £762.58
ORIGIN: Japan
TYPE: NEX cutaway
TOP: Solid cedar
BACK/SIDES: Solid mahogany (sides laminate)
MAX RIM DEPTH: 110mm
MAX BODY WIDTH: 395mm
NECK: Mahogany
SCALE LENGTH: 646mm (25.4-inches)
TUNERS: Chrome Gotoh
NUT/WIDTH: Bone/37mm
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood
FRETS: 20
BRIDGE/SPACING: Rosewood/54mm
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 2.05/4.5
OPTIONS: Dreadnought version (£762), OM version (£891).
LEFT-HANDERS: Available by end of year (£844)
FINISH: Antique satin (as reviewed)
Takamine Guitars
01342 331 700
www.takamineguitars.eu

Test results

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

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★



ETN10-C

PRICE: £1,021.08
ORIGIN: Japan
TYPE: Dreadnought cutaway
TOP: Solid cedar
BACK/SIDES: Solid mahogany (sides laminate)
MAX RIM DEPTH: 125mm
MAX BODY WIDTH: 400mm
NECK: Mahogany
SCALE LENGTH: 646mm (25.4-inches)
TUNERS: Chrome Gotoh
NUT/WIDTH: Bone/37mm
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood
FRETS: 20
BRIDGE/SPACING: Rosewood/53mm
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 2.3/5.00
OPTIONS: 12-string (£1,021.08), Tobacco sunburst finish (£1,021.08), Bear-Claw Spruce top (£1,021.08), OM shape (£1,021.08)
LEFT-HANDERS: Yes, available now (£1,068.08)
FINISH: Natural satin (as reviewed)

Test results

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

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★



EF341SC

PRICE: £1,021.08
ORIGIN: Japan
TYPE: Dreadnought cutaway
TOP: Solid cedar
BACK/SIDES: Solid maple (sides laminate)
MAX RIM DEPTH: 125mm
MAX BODY WIDTH: 399mm
NECK: Mahogany
SCALE LENGTH: 646mm (25.4-inches)
TUNERS: Chrome Gotoh
NUT/WIDTH: Bone/37mm
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood
FRETS: 20
BRIDGE/SPACING: Rosewood/54mm
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 2.3/5.00
OPTIONS: Natural gloss finish (£1,021.08), Tobacco sunburst finish (£1,021.08)
LEFT-HANDERS: Available by end of year (£1091.58)
FINISH: Black Gloss (as reviewed)

Test results

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

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★



TF740FS

PRICE: £1,679.07
ORIGIN: Japan
TYPE: OM cutaway
TOP: Solid cedar
BACK/SIDES: Solid mahogany
MAX RIM DEPTH: 119mm
MAX BODY WIDTH: 388mm
NECK: Mahogany
SCALE LENGTH: 646mm (25.4-inches)
TUNERS: Open-g geared Gotoh
NUT/WIDTH: Bone/41mm
FINGERBOARD: Ebony
FRETS: 20
BRIDGE/SPACING: Rosewood/59mm
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 2.1/4.6
OPTIONS: None
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISH: Natural gloss

Test results

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

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★