



TAYLOR ACADEMY 12E

£659

School's in for Taylor's entry level guitars

There are certain guitars players will aspire to own as they develop – a Les Paul, a proper Tele... maybe a PRS. And for acoustic players, their wishlist will often have two names at the top; Martin and Taylor. But despite their high-end reputations, both these titans of tonewood have been making moves to woo entry-level players in recent years – Martin with its Dreadnought Jr and, even further back, Taylor's impressive travel models, the Baby and GS Mini. With the full-size Academy Series though, Taylor is really getting serious, and this Grand Concert model, nylon version and a dreadnought are all

And it plays very well indeed. Low action, no buzz and Taylor NT neck with an Ebony 'board that makes us wish we'd had this guitar when we started. But the sounds here suggest a guitar that could be a trade-up for existing acoustic owners too. It's a Taylor spruce top and we expected brightness, but the high mids here really sing for chord work. You're trading some of the low end depth of a larger-bodied dreadnought but we'd be quite happy to for the addictive chorussy trebles when we dig in. And in DADGAD that character helps melodies to stand out in the midst of strumming.

Plugging in, it's time to take stock of the ES-B. It's still an

WE WISH WE'D HAD THIS WHEN WE STARTED PLAYING

available in standard (£563 for the 12) and electro options, as here. For so-called 'beginner' guitars they're dearer than some of the competition. But is the Taylor difference more than money?

The solid spruce top is paler than we're used to, but it does give the Academy it's own clean aesthetic. Designer and Taylor master luthier Andy Powers wanted to create a guitar for newcomers that's 'more inviting, more forgiving, more comfortable' here but with a simpler more minimal design, too. One of the features with a foot in both camps is the most noticeable – the mahogany arm rest for the picking arm. While it may look strange and puzzling to some, they idea is to make the playing experience more comfortable. And it works, it feels right; drawing the guitar closer to the body when playing.

Expression System but a distinct version we've seen on the Baby and Big Baby models. Beginners gain an onboard tuner but lose the bass control in place of a 'tone' (treble roll-off). While we'd like to be able to boost the low end there's no doubt the all-round performance here represents the character organically, and is notably more 'acoustic' than other stock piezo systems we've tested.

So is the Academy worth the extra cost? Compared with much of its competition at this price, it's the difference between a good guitar and a great one.

Rob Laing

SUMMARY	FEATURES	★	★	★	★	★
SOUND QUALITY		★	★	★	★	★
VALUE FOR MONEY		★	★	★	★	★
BUILD QUALITY		★	★	★	★	★
PLAYABILITY		★	★	★	★	★
OVERALL RATING		★	★	★	★	★

1 GUITAR BODY
The 12e gives more for less, rewarding softer playing with dynamic resonance. So it's a good practical option for fingerstyle and practising at lower levels

2 ARM REST
The choice of mahogany for the armrest does make it more visually conspicuous, but it really does enhance the playing experience here

3 ES-B CONTROLS
Setting the tone flat at 12 o'clock is good for fingerpicking, but there's plenty of treble for cutting through a band mix, and without any plasticky piezo quack

AT A GLANCE

BODY: Grand Concert electro acoustic
TOP: Solid Sitka Spruce
BACK & SIDES: Layered sapele
NECK: Sapele
SCALE: 632mm (24.875")
FRETS: 20
ELECTRICS: Taylor ES-B
HARDWARE: Taylor 100/200 18:1 chrome tuners
LEFT-HANDED: Yes, no extra charge
FINISH: Matte
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