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LTD TL-6 & TL-6N

£469 & £469

ESP's LTD division takes the wraps off a pair of thinline semi-solid electros. Born to rock? We find out...

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What You Need To Know

- 1 LTD? Don't they make hard-rockin' electrics?**
Yes, LTD primarily makes solidbodies based on ESP and E-II models. A range of acoustics was mooted but these thinlines are the only 'acoustic' models to have actually appeared.
- 2 Are they acoustics or are they solidbodies?**
LTD calls them "thinline transducer-electric" models that feature an "Acoustic Resonant chamber". There's quite a lot of air inside the bodies.
- 3 Do they have magnetic pickups as well?**
At the moment, aside from our two electro acoustics on review, and a 12-string steel version, there are no 'hybrid' style magnetic electric and electro-acoustic versions. Mind you, if ESP's design team is reading this...

Doing live sound, especially in makeshift venues with often makeshift gear, can be a scary job: you have a whole band counting on you to, basically, make them sound as good as they can. But a serious dilemma, towards the end of last year, prompted this review. A four-piece band doing some post Britpop era songs shouldn't have presented a problem, but the singer turned up with his Yamaha electro-acoustic and we struggled to get a sound out of it. Let's rephrase that: we struggled to get a sound at the *volume* the rest of the band were playing without feedback. He had no acoustic amp, so was relying on the two stage front-placed monitors to not only hear his voice but his guitar, too.

As part of a small festival line-up there was no time for a lengthy sound check. Plug in, line check... play! Out front, the acoustic sat in the mix nicely with the kit and electric rhythm guitar but we just couldn't get enough in the monitor, without feedback. Fair play, then, to the

singer/guitarist – he barely heard a note he played all night!

When LTD's distributor, Selectron UK, called us to say they had advance samples of a new thinline electro-acoustic range, we immediately thought of that poor singer. If he'd have had a more solid thinline electro, especially one that didn't cost the earth, feedback

The Rivals

Compared with conventional electros, thinline semi-solids are scarce. **Taylor's T5z** is a thinline hollow-body steel-string that starts with the **Classic** at £1,259 on the street, has two transducers and a visible magnetic pickup, and five sounds that voice them individually or in combination. **Godin's Acousticaster 40th Anniversary** (£1,099) is solidbody-sized, but again hollow inside with a neck humbucker and under-saddle pickup. The **Multiac Steel Duet Ambiance** (£1,499), is primarily hollow with Fishman Aura electrics and an under-saddle. The numerous nylon models start with the **Multiac Nylon Encore** at £849



The bridge is a tie-block design, so isn't ideal for the steel-string TL-6



might have been less of an issue and that difficult gig might have been saved.

The LTD TL-6 and nylon string TL-6N are completed by the 12-string TL-12: a compact range with each model offered in gloss natural or black. All three guitars share the same geometry, a slightly upsized version of ESP's Eclipse electric. Across its lower bouts it measures 368mm (14.5 inches) and in depth a very solidbody-like 49mm. Scale length is PRS-like at 635mm (25 inches) and, in electric solidbody style, both necks join the body at the 16th fret rather than the more acoustic-standard 14th or 12th.

Yet despite a light solidbody weight, the TL design has plenty of air inside: the centre-jointed mahogany slab is routed out to leave back, sides, a centre block under the acoustic-like bridge and a pocket for the glued-in neck. This is capped with the quoted maple top on the steel string and a spruce top on the nylon string. A sizeable 'slash'-shaped soundhole is placed on the bass side; the

treble side is a little more solid and there's a rear 'control' cavity that holds the 9V battery that powers the electrics in a rather archaic fashion. No easy-action, flip-top compartments here.

Obviously, the primary difference between the steel and nylon models is the neck width and string spacing. Both guitars use the same bridge with a 54mm string spacing. The steel-string nut is typically

narrower at 43.45mm with a string spacing of 35mm, while the nylon string's neck broadens out to 48.9mm with a string spacing of 41mm. The different widths influence the shape yet both feel nice and mainstream, and like the fretting and binding, it's a pretty clean job. Both instruments use a 350mm (13.78-inch) radius, too, which will please steel-string players crossing over to nylon strings

The all-black TL-6 is a striking and elegant-looking instrument that certainly fits in with a more show-off rock or modern country electro-acoustic intention



The B-Band preamp is the heart of the TL line's design



The guitar's back is sculpted to enable better upper-fret access



Both guitars use B-Band's Electret Film under-saddle transducer

but probably won't endear the TL-6N to classical players wanting to go electric.

The heart of the TL's design is the B-Band pickup and preamp in the form of its Electret Film under-saddle transducer and side-mounted TP-7. The latter is well spec'd with volume, three-band EQ, tuner and phase switch. A metal football jack-plate is side-mounted and very stage-ready. Nice.

Sounds

There's little doubt that in its all-black finish, the TL-6 is a striking and elegant-looking instrument that certainly fits in with a more show-off rock or modern country electro-acoustic intention. The natural-finished nylon string is more classic-looking and really wouldn't look out of place in any setting aside from a classical recital. The relatively small body means they feel more like solidbodies played seated but with two supplied strap buttons also work well strapped on. That being said, the TL-6N is nearly a half kilo heavier, which points to less-than-careful wood selection. This means

that, of the two guitars, the steel-string has the better feel.

Acoustically, despite the semi-hollow body, we don't have too much to play with. Whether or not it's the lower tension of the nylon strings and their lower energy, the TL-6N seems the most compromised of the pair, and while both have enough volume for practice neither is the most inspiring and both lack the acoustic response of higher-priced instruments like Godin's Multiacs or indeed Taylor's T5z. But, again, by design this is an electro made to be used at higher volumes than simply a standard acoustic with a pickup.

The TL-6 certainly sounds nicely acoustic-like plugged in. It's not the hottest in terms of output of our electro arsenal, and like any active EQ, background hiss can be a little intrusive if you boost all the EQs. Used sensibly, however, there was no more obvious hiss than, for example, our Yamaha NCX900FM's preamp. Sonically, it's pretty even without an overly piezo-like response. The low E is a little underpowered and we can't help questioning the bridge.



The TL-6N has a slotted headstock that's befitting its nylon strings



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Essentially, it's a tie-block bridge, as used on the nylon string, but because the strings aren't tied there's a really steep angle up to the top of the bridge saddle – you need to curl the end of the string to get it there and even then it wasn't easy. What effect this over-sharp back angle has on the under-saddle (or the string) is anyone's guess but we got a little more conventional response when in drop D. But again, mixing an acoustic in with a band invariably means trimming the lows so if it's a little deficient it's in the right direction.

The TL-6N in that regard sounds more balanced, although the low end is far from over-egged. What we have is certainly a nylon string character; it's a nice player for those looking for a crossover feel and responds well with fingers or pick.

And, yes, both are very feedback-resistant and the onboard phase switch certainly helps. Of course, the TL's design still has plenty of air in it and although the bridge block is damping a lot of the top's

movement, feedback will always be potentially possible. But with a decent onboard EQ like LR Baggs' Venue DI or Fishman's Platinum Pro EQ, you'll achieve perfectly usable results in a band setting with either guitar.

Verdict

Either of these would get you through a noisy pub band gig no problem, and unless you play at insane volume, feedback should be kept under control, too. For the solo artist playing in a hear-a-pin-drop environment, or in a studio setting, well, you'd probably want to use something more accurate-sounding.

Conversely, for the more adventurous among us who like to use effects, loopers and percussion as part of our live acoustic sound, both designs have a lot of legs, not least with their more electric-like playability. Simply put, in louder stage environments either would be a good 'acoustic' buddy to have, and neither is going to break the bank. **G**



LTD TL-6

PRICE: £469

ORIGIN: Indonesia

TYPE: Single-cut, semi-solid steel-string electro-acoustic

TOP: Maple

BACK/SIDES: Mahogany

MAX RIM DEPTH: 49mm

MAX BODY WIDTH: 368mm

NECK: Mahogany, 'Thin U' profile

SCALE LENGTH: 635mm (25")

TUNERS: Enclosed Grovers with plastic amber-coloured buttons, chrome-plated

NUT/WIDTH: Graph Tech Nubone XB/43.45mm

FINGERBOARD: Bound rosewood with small abalone dot inlays, 350mm (13.78") radius

FRETS: 22, medium jumbo

BRIDGE/SPACING: Rosewood w/ compensated Graph Tech Nubone XB saddle/54mm

WEIGHT (KG/LB): 2.82/6.22

ELECTRICS: B-Band under-saddle Electret Film transducer with B-Band T-7 Preamp with volume, 3-band EQ, tuner and phase switch

OPTIONS: Aside from colour, none. The 12-string TL-12 costs £519

LEFT-HANDERS: No

FINISH: Black Gloss (as reviewed), Natural Gloss

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GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

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

Guitarist says: A classy looking and affordable stage electro-acoustic that does what it says on the tin



LTD TL-6N

PRICE: £469

ORIGIN: Indonesia

TYPE: Single-cut, semi-solid nylon-string electro-acoustic

TOP: Spruce

BACK/SIDES: Mahogany

MAX RIM DEPTH: 49mm

MAX BODY WIDTH: 367mm

NECK: Mahogany, 'Thin U' profile

SCALE LENGTH: 635mm (25")

TUNERS: Classic style with plastic amber-coloured buttons, chrome-plated

NUT/WIDTH: Graph Tech Nubone XB/48.9mm

FINGERBOARD: Bound rosewood with small abalone dot inlays, 350mm (13.78") radius

FRETS: 22, medium jumbo

BRIDGE/SPACING: Rosewood w/ compensated Graph Tech Nubone XB saddle/54mm

WEIGHT (KG/LB): 3.2/7.06

ELECTRICS: B-Band under-saddle Electret Film transducer with B-Band T-7 Preamp with volume, 3-band EQ, tuner and phase switch

OPTIONS: Aside from colour, none

LEFT-HANDERS: No

FINISH: Natural Gloss (as reviewed), Black Gloss

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

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

Guitarist says: A nylon-string stage electro that's very good value in its class, and has immense crossover appeal



Both guitars join the body at the 16th fret – unusual for an acoustic guitar