





TAYLOR ACADEMY SERIES 10E & 12E BOTH £659

A brand new series aimed at entry-level players certainly sounds very promising on paper, but how does it fare in practice?

Words Rob Laing Photography Neil Godwin

What You Need To Know

1 Are entry-level models really a new thing for Taylor?

The company has certainly reached out to that side of the market before with Mexican-made models such as the Baby, Big Baby, GS Mini and full-size 114 and 110, but this is its first series aimed squarely at new players and those who want to experience a Taylor at a lower price point.

2 Are all the models electro?

There are three models in the series currently and each one is available in electro and non-electro options: the grand concert 12 and dreadnought 10 we have here, and 12-N nylon grand concert. The Academy Series uses Taylor's ES-B, an offset of the ES-2 concept already used on lower-end guitars such as the Baby and Big Baby Taylor electros.

3 What's that on the lower bout?

It's an armrest, previously seen on Taylor's premium high-end models and now brought to the Academy Series for comfort that could be beneficial to all players, not just the beginners.

The idea that newcomers to the world of acoustic have never had it so good could be a double-edged sword for those who find it hard to settle on their guitar choice. As the level of instrument quality your money buys continues to increase, so does the list of options out there. The last few years have seen interesting developments from some of the acoustic world's biggest names: Martin embraced the beginner and budget-conscious side of the market with its Dreadnought Juniors, and Guild's Westerly series affirmed its commitment to the entry-level buyer. But before them, Taylor was putting its instruments into new hands thanks to the Baby and GS Mini travel-sized lines. Now the Californians have turned their attention to a full-size series that could put a Taylor in reach of aspiring players sooner. And we're all ears.

"It's important to give a beginning player the most comfortable, gratifying experience to make a welcoming first impression," says Taylor's master luthier Andy Powers of the genesis behind the Academy Series. "Ironically, in many respects, a player who is just beginning deserves the best-playing guitar," he adds. "An experienced player can make almost anything work; they'll simply appreciate a good guitar more. But when you're starting out, you really need everything going for you."

It's an idea that shatters those first guitar memories of cheese-gratingly high action

and warped necks that some of us still shudder at. Like a lot of Powers' concepts, it makes good sense and manifests in the designs he's worked on here.

The Academy aesthetic is simple. The notably light hue of the solid Sitka spruce here won't be to some traditionalist tastes, but it gives the guitars a clean, defined look that, as we'll find out, is reflective of performance. Nevertheless, despite the simple acrylic dot fret markers, it's not completely utilitarian; the laminated birch and fiber rope braid design rosette is understated but stylish.

Eyebrows will be raised at the sight of the upper body's armrest. It's a high-end feature we saw on last issue's 814ce DLX, but, again, it's not here for cosmetic purposes. The inclusion underlines not just the Academy 'form following function' manifesto, but also Taylor's approach to sustainability; this simplified version is made from mahogany left over from cutting neck blanks. While that's commendable, the choice of mahogany sandwiched between the sapele and spruce looks a little conspicuous for our liking. In practice, though, it's an inspired design that can encourage a player to connect in those crucial first moments when interest with a guitar can switch to a must-have. It does this by physically making the guitar easier to bring closer to the player's body, and is especially beneficial on the larger dreadnought 10e.



Sounds

It's soon apparent that neither of these guitars are lacking Taylor's spruce top hallmarks – bright and resonant trebles with assured projection. The low action on both is extremely welcoming across the ebony 'boards, too, and will help open boundaries for aspiring players. Combined with the response of these instruments, it creates an immediately enjoyable playing experience. For softer players, they sound impressively detailed and nuanced at low volumes. The grand concert's pronounced high-mids have a wonderfully choral quality in chord work in conjunction with the treble resonance – and it's positively addictive when playing rhythmic Celtic melodies in DADGAD and E modal – but take things down and the sensitivity to subtlety is inspiring. Keeping the noise down in the lounge at night certainly becomes less of a problem.

Taylor's vision of the dreadnought as the flatpicker and strummer, with the grand concert as the guitar for fingerstylists, is understandable but not a hard and fast rule. The 10e offers lower mid presence alongside the deeper bass response, but the 12e's higher range energy is distinct for chord work, too – even adding some mandolin sweetness when capo'd high. It will come down to personal preference for players, with shape and tonal balance, but both guitars fare very well as all-rounders at either end of the spectrum for delicate picking, and their projection doesn't lose its clear definition under heavy strummed playing, either.

So far, so reassuringly Taylor. But plugged in, we wonder if a compromise has come in the shape of the ES-B piezo system last seen on the Baby and Big Baby electros. The good news is the ES-B represents the qualities of these two guitars well, but with notable differences. The grand concert sounds more organic to us through our acoustic combo, with plenty of treble on tap for holding your own in a band setup. Thankfully, it

never becomes too brittle or plastic-like in character like some piezos, and we found the flat 12 o'clock tone setting just right for solo fingerpicking. Though the subtler bass allows those jangly high-mids and trebles to continue shimmering, it should be noted with the streamlined Academy approach to EQ there's no effective way of boosting low-end from the guitar – the tone control is a treble roll-off.

Our larger-bodied dreadnought model immediately sounds like a hotter proposition. Its definition and richer low-end qualities are still present, but we find ourselves dialling back the tone more than the 12e model as the high-end sounds punchier here lower on the tone dial. And for some players, the frequency-shaping advantages offered from EQ control via a PA's mixing desk or pedal unit could come into play more to mellow things out.

For softer players, both guitars sound impressively detailed and nuanced at low volumes

1. For the model 10 dreadnought shape, Powers drew from the slightly smaller 15/16-size footprint of the Big Baby for comfort, opting for a body dimension that was 0.75-inch deeper for greater low-end response





2. In place of the standard ES2's bass control, the ES-B offers a chromatic tuner leaving a streamlined tone/volume layout found in some of the Academy series' rivals. Life from its two CR2032 batteries can be conserved with an automatic switch-off after three minutes

3. Both these Academy models continue Taylor's partnership with Elixir, shipping with Phosphor Bronze Light strings that feel very well paired with the bright character of these guitars

4. Taylor's 100/200 tuners on the Academy Series have an 18:1 ratio



5. An otherwise simple aesthetic is enhanced by a stylish braid-design rosette

6. The ES-B produces a more organic sound on our smaller 12e grand concert model, while the larger 10e dread' offers up a hotter quality

7. Both models feature layered sapele back and sides, as seen previously on the GS Mini, Baby and Big Baby models



The upper body's armrest is a high-end feature and an inspired design that can encourage a player to connect in those crucial first moments



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8. The NT neck design is a very welcoming experience on both models, and makes for an accessible learning journey for beginners

9. The choice of mahogany for the armrest certainly makes it stand out, and when playing it feels immediately comfortable. The verdict on the armrest in the *Guitarist* office was unanimous: we could instantly see the benefits for beginners and younger players, especially

Verdict

Even at their comparatively low price points by the company's standards, Taylor has serious competition in the market from cheaper models. This is where the 'Andy Powers difference' comes into play: these guitars sound and feel superior acoustically and plugged in than most models we've played in their class, with the exception of Martin. There the preference will be personal, but the ES-B makes a strong case for those who need an electro. The Academy Series represent a very clear vision, and in many ways, a dream beginner guitar, as well as potential trade-up for some existing players – one that can inspire and go the distance with a guitarist from bedroom to stage. **G**



TAYLOR ACADEMY SERIES 10E

PRICE: £659 (inc gigbag)
ORIGIN: Mexico
TYPE: Dreadnought electro
TOP: Solid Sitka spruce
BACK/SIDES: Layered sapele
MAX RIM DEPTH: 117mm
MAX BODY WIDTH: 406mm
NECK: Sapele
SCALE LENGTH: 632mm (24.9")
TUNERS: Taylor 100/200 enclosed, chrome-plated
NUT/WIDTH: Nubone/42.86mm
FINGERBOARD: Ebony, 4mm dot inlays
FRETS: 20, small
BRIDGE/SPACING: Micarta/55.5mm
ELECTRICS: Taylor ES-B with volume, tone (treble roll-off), tuner
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 1.95/4.29
OPTIONS: Non-electro 10 (£563) also available
LEFT-HANDERS: Yes, no extra charge
FINISHES: Natural matt varnish

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PROS Great playability; very well balanced across the spectrum; armrest enhances playing comfort

CONS The ES-B's lack of bass control, as found on the ES-2, may be an issue for some live players



TAYLOR ACADEMY SERIES 12E

PRICE: £659 (inc gigbag)
ORIGIN: Mexico
TYPE: Grand concert electro
TOP: Solid Sitka spruce
BACK/SIDES: Layered sapele
MAX RIM DEPTH: 111mm
MAX BODY WIDTH: 381mm
NECK: Sapele
SCALE LENGTH: 632mm (24.9")
TUNERS: Taylor 100/200 enclosed, chrome-plated
NUT/WIDTH: Nubone/42.9mm
FINGERBOARD: Ebony, 4mm dot inlays
FRETS: 20, small
BRIDGE/SPACING: Micarta/55.5mm
ELECTRICS: Taylor ES-B with volume, tone (treble roll-off), tuner
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 1.725/3.8
OPTIONS: Non-electro 12 (£563), nylon-string 12-N (£611) and electro 12e-N (£707) also available
LEFT-HANDERS: Yes, no extra charge
FINISHES: Natural matt varnish



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PROS Inspiring high mids and trebles; responsive playing experience; ES-B outclasses a lot of the piezo competition

CONS As before, the lack of bass control on the ES-B could be an issue