

Smooth As Satin



The Takamine En 20c – Jumbo Cutaway Electric Acoustic

If fashion moves in cycles then the guitar is no exception. After all the high-gloss lacquer finishes which have covered guitars for so long, Takamine have returned to a simple 'satin finish' on their new range of acoustics.

The appearance is rather like that of a handmade, french polished guitar, which to my eyes gives the instrument class. With this finish you can really study the grain and check the craftsmanship, both of which are good; the top is a fine-grained Cedar, the back and sides high quality Mahogany and the fingerboard Rosewood.

The model I tried out was the Jumbo steel-string instrument. With a lower bout of 43.5 cms it's a big guitar. Accessibility to the 20 frets is facilitated by a cutaway, which is vital on a guitar this size. There are no fret markers on the fingerboard, but tiny dots on the 3rd, 5th, 7th, 9th and 12th frets along the side. There is no purfling and the body binding is of the simplest design.

Takamine have gone all the way with this 'no frills' approach. I did find myself getting thrown by the complete lack of fret markers on the top of the fingerboard, but that's just a matter of preference.

How it played acoustically

As with all the Takamines I've ever played, I was struck with the sense of balance. The evenness of string response over the entire fretboard is perfect, the sound warm and bright and the sustain from both bass and treble ends quite incredible. I tested this with my tuner and the notes seem to hang on far longer than

one usually expects. The intonation was extremely good. With wear, the treble strings dropped a little flat, but that is to be expected. I'm very hard on strings and can wear out a set during one gig, being a guitarist of the sweaty palm variety!

I fitted the Takamine with Superwound phosphor bronze strings .012 to .054, which seemed to respond best. The neck and fingerboard are very smooth and compatible and beautifully finished. The machine heads are Takamine's own make, the pegs being of an attractive pearloid material and function as well as any Schaller or Grovers.

How it played electrically

I've always like the 'palathetic' pickup on Takamine guitars. The equalisation, volume plus treble and bass, is easy to use, consisting of sliding controls rather than circular knobs. I find this is preferable because you can tell how your balance stands at a glance. Even at a high volume the sound balance remains; the high treble rings through and the bass remains rich. Many pickups seem to give the bass a crunchy electric sound, which I really don't like, but Takamine have overcome this.

The manufacturers suggest that the sound is best with the volume on 2-3 to give the pickup a chance to push out a combined sound of string and body. I would agree with this, but it can create a problem live, as volume level 5 becomes very loud and 1-2 too quiet, so changing from rhythm to lead levels is critical. A small criticism, but one Takamine could possibly look into.

Conclusions

Visually these guitars are beautiful; I don't have any fixed ideas about acoustic guitar design, but the simplicity of the traditional shape has a lot to recommend it. The finish and attention to detail is first class, you only have to look closely at the struts to see how well finished everything is. The sound, both amplified and acoustically is remarkable.

The guitar costs a mere £395 (including VAT) which is simply marvellous value.

Nick Webb

Specifications

Make Takamine Model EN20C Jumbo Cutaway Electric/Acoustic Colour Satin Finish

Overall length;	1m 60cm/62.9"
Width lower bout;	435mm/17.12"
Width upper bout;	320mm/12.5"
Width at waist;	260mm/10.2"
Body depth;	115mm/4.5"
Weight;	2.4kg/5.2lbs
Scale length;	648mm/25 1/2"
Width at nut;	44.4mm/1 11/16"
Frets: no; 20 type; nickel/silver jumbo medium flat	
Bracing pattern;	basic X brace
Construction materials:	
body; table	Cedar
back, sides and neck;	Mahogany
fingerboard;	Rosewood
nut;	Bone
bridge;	black finished Basswood
saddle;	2 piece Bone
machine heads;	gold plated-amber pearloid (Takamine)

Electrics; Palathetic pickup active; battery powered preamplifier controls; gain, treble and bass. Also available: nylon strung cutaway and jumbo, and 14 fret join dreadnoughts without cutaway.