

SOUND

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SOLID STATE OF MIND

Taylor Classic, Standard and Custom solidbody electric guitars

BY ERIC KIRKLAND

SEVERAL MONTHS AGO, one of my industry contacts called to alert me to a top-secret project at the Taylor factory. He didn't say anything specific, yet his tone of voice suggested a breakthrough akin to the successful reverse engineering of alien propulsion hardware at Area 51. Considering Taylor's history as an acoustic guitar maker, I assumed the company was working on a new bracing system or another development in acoustic pickup technology. I never would have guessed that Taylor was actually building a line of solidbody electric guitars, the first in its history.

A new pickup, invented by Taylor's design group, was the jumping off point for this project, but it was only the first in a long string of innovations. Rather than rely on half-century-old ideals, Taylor rethought every aspect of design for this new line of solidbodies. Quickly realizing that the limitations of currently available parts could never meet its performance and aesthetic goals, Taylor decided to make all of the guitars' parts in-house. The resulting advances in technology are so profound that one might say Taylor has reinvented the electric guitar for the 21st century.

Three guitars are currently available in the line: the Classic, Standard and Custom, each with a distinct tone and set of appointments. This month, I had a chance to test each of them.

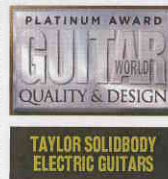
FEATURES

I HAD A LOT of fun just rotating these guitars in my hands and discovering all of the new parts Taylor created and the ways it devised to put these guitars together. For instance, when viewed from the side, the neck appears to be set and glued, but turning the guitar over reveals the single recessed hex-head bolt that secures the neck to the

body. The neck joint is similar to the construction used in the Taylor T-5 hollowbody electrics, with a neck heel that locks into the body like two pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. A special washer behind the bolt pulls the neck in and down when the bolt is tightened. This is without a doubt the most precise and effective bolt-on joint ever used on a guitar, offering the best attributes of both bolt-on and set-in neck construction. The neck's profile is fairly thin, with a flat heel and a fast 15-inch radiused ebony board. Maple is used for the Classic's neck, while the Standard and Custom feature mahogany.

The single-cutaway bodies are not uniformly thick. They are deepest under the bridge and gradually contour to meet the neck joint, resulting in a more universally comfortable shape and reducing the left-hand wrist deviation required to stretch across the frets. Even though Taylor lists these as solidbody guitars, only the Classic's body is purely solid. The other two models are strategically chambered for weight relief and tonal considerations. Also special on the Standard and Custom are the figured maple and walnut tops. These gorgeous examples of nature's beauty are actually .13-inch thick inlays set flawlessly into the bodies. It's an eco-friendly design but not actually a cost-saving feature, given the difficulty of accurately placing an inlay of this size. Highly polished clear coats give these two high-end pieces the look of old English furniture and all of the edges on the guitar are rounded and relieved, so that they feel good wherever they make contact with your body.

Taylor's attention to detail extended especially to the bridge. This smooth aluminum masterpiece feels fantastic under your hand, because there are no visible screws or sharp edges to cause discomfort. All adjustments are accessed through the underside of the body. The saddles are also locked into



TAYLOR SOLIDBODY ELECTRIC GUITARS

LIST PRICES: Classic, \$1,748.00; Standard, \$2,398.00; Custom, \$3,098.00

MANUFACTURER: Taylor Guitars, taylorguitars.com

BODY: Chambered sapele (Standard and Custom), solid ash (Classic)

NECK: T-Lock bolt-on; mahogany (Standard and Custom), maple (Classic)

FINGERBOARD: Ebony (Standard and Custom), rosewood (Classic)

SCALE LENGTH: 24 7/8 inches

FRETS: 22

HARDWARE: Custom Taylor aluminum bridge

CONTROLS: Volume, tone, five-way switch

PICKUPS: Custom Taylor humbuckers; covered (Classic and Custom), exposed coils (Standard)

Taylor's custom pickups use new magnet types to offer remarkable energy and transparency.

Figured tops are seamlessly inlaid into the body.

The tone control acts more like the Q control on a wah pedal, manipulating midrange growl and peaks without affecting clarity.



CUSTOM

CHECK

HAGSTROM SWEDE 162 MICHAEL KELLY PATRIOT BLACK 164 SCHECTER C-1 FR 164 IBANEZ S SERIES S320 166 WASHBURN IDOL SERIES WI64 166



CLASSIC

Bolt-on T-Lock joint is the tightest in the business, delivering a fit equal to that of a glued-in neck.

The bridge saddles lock into place and have a smooth feel for players that want to rest their hands here.

STANDARD

The Standard and Custom models feature chambered sapele bodies.

whatever position is set, so that there's no way that the height or left-to-right position can change through normal play or by resting your hand on the bridge. It's a terrific design and another first in the industry. Taylor even calculated every string angle such that all break angles remain correct irrespective of saddle height.

ELECTRONICS

AS STATED ABOVE, Taylor's new pickup set the ball in motion for the company's solidbody guitar line. Taylor production design manager David Hosler became very tight lipped when I asked him about the pickups. He did, however, divulge that the company has discovered how to manipulate the magnetic flux fields in order to create a pickup with greater signal strength and less signal distortion. I also ascertained that Taylor is using a type of magnet new to the pickup industry.

Whatever the secret formula, these pickups translate tone with incredible energy and build harmonics in a clarifying pattern. Although the chrome-covered pickups on the Classic and Custom look very different from the exposed coils on the Standard, their performance is almost identical in all

respects. Taylor put a lot of thought into how the five-way switch should best operate, so that all selected coil combinations are humbucking and maintain a reasonably consistent level of output. To add some flavor into the guitar's electronics, the passive tone knob is designed so that turning it down achieves something akin to the vocal midrange of a cocked wah.

PERFORMANCE

ON THE STANDARD AND Custom models, the exceptional resonance and airy tone produced by the chambered bodies were apparent even before the guitars were amplified—not surprising considering that Taylor has been specializing in acoustic tone for the past 30 years. The Classic's response was less lively, but its body tone, maple neck and secret Taylor pickups worked together to create a stout attack and screaming sustain that mated especially well to any overdriven amp.

Think of the covered pickups' tone as a combination of a vintage P.A.F.'s deep roar, a P90's raunchy bite and a single-coil's bell-like clarity. Although the Standard model's pickups use the same materials and specs, their wider string sample and exposed coils cre-

ate slightly different nuances. These pickups, combined with the Standard's chambered body, produce howling overtones that are activated by simply bending a note. In my testing, this eerie and intoxicating ghosting effect consistently manifested itself only through Taylor's Standard model.

Players who want the greatest level of detail and richest overall response will probably opt for the Taylor Custom. Its blend of warm construction materials, body chambers and complex pickups give it a totally unique blend of archtop and solidbody qualities. Even though the guitar's construction is practically identical to the Taylor Standard, the change of pickups adds a slightly brassier edge to each note's brilliant bloom.

THE BOTTOM LINE

TAYLOR'S REVOLUTIONARY solidbody electric guitars come as close to re-inventing the wheel as is conceivable using traditional materials and forms of signal generation. Their custom parts and resourceful designs make these guitars entirely unlike any others on the market, and the enormity of this accomplishment cannot be overstated.

Regarding performance, even though these descriptions are gross generalities, the Classic's maple neck and solid ash body create singing sustain with a single-malt punch, while the Standard's chambered body and unusual pickup-driven overtones form an inimitably soulful instrument. Finally, the Custom is a tour de force of sound and materials, suitable for even the most particular and well-funded player. ✨

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