



# Shadow SH 145 Prestige & SH NFX-AC £119 & £109

## The rivals

SH 145 PRESTIGE	
Takamine Tri-Ax	£119
Fishman Rare Earth Humbucking	£189
LR Baggs M1 Active	£229

Though considerably cheaper in the UK, Takamine's Tri-Ax is just a re-branded LR Baggs M1 Active, in black, with a unique triaxial secondary coil suspension system that senses top vibration, active/passive switch, Allen-head pole pieces with threadless tops, gold-plated output socket and better, tidier-looking clamps. The slimmer, black Rare Earth is less conspicuous, and differs in its lack of adjustable pole pieces and superior, cork-lined clamps. As mentioned, the Baggs M1 Active is the same as the Tri-Ax, only with an ivory-coloured top and no active/passive switch

Shadow play: two new and intriguing pickups from one of the most successful and enduring brands in the business, Germany's Shadow  
by Matthew Wig

Germany's Shadow was one of the pioneers of acoustic instrument pickup technology back in the early 1970s, and remains a major brand to this day. However, it seems that Fishman, LR Baggs and B-Band have been hogging the limelight in recent years, especially at the professional end of the steel-string acoustic pickup market. Still, Shadow continues to produce innovative products; and while a pro-standard magnetic soundhole pickup is nothing that hasn't been seen before, its new Nanoflex under-saddle pickups are an intriguing development.

### SH145Prestige

Like Fishman's Rare Earth and LR Baggs' M1 (issue 253), this unit extends

into the soundhole, but looks fairly slim from the front. It's encased in a tough moulded plastic housing, and is lighter than its US counterparts. The mounting clamps are a bit fiddly, and need longer tightening screws to cater for thick-lipped soundholes (Lowden/Avalon). Despite this poor design, both clamping surfaces are padded.

Internally, this active pickup uses a stacked-coil hum-cancelling set-up, with two samarium cobalt bar magnets, and is totally shielded from extraneous electrical interference. The Phillips head pole-pieces are adjustable for fine-tuning string-to-string balance.

**The SH NFX-AC delivers a solid, full-bodied and generally balanced tone, with negligible background noise and plenty of output, and you do get a sense of the acoustic character coming through**

The SH NFX-AC is an under-saddle pickup with integrated preamp and volume control



The SH 145 Prestige has adjustable pole-pieces



The Prestige's padded clamps spare the wear and tear on your soundhole

The onboard preamp means you'll have no problem driving long leads and plugging into just about anything, and power consumption is refreshingly low.

**SOUNDS:** More like the Baggs M1 than the Rare Earth, this pickup delivers a broad open crisp response. We hear deep well-rounded bass, an effectively pruned mid-range and smooth treble that captures all the acoustic sparkle with the soft-edged attack that only magnetic pickups can achieve. The wound strings retain their acoustic 'zing', and all in all there's excellent clarity. The 'magnetic sound' is most evident if you play percussively, but string balance is great and all the intricacies of your playing are captured. Really nice for fingerpicking.

SH NFX-AC

This nifty little under-saddle pickup system is designed to offer quick, easy and almost entirely non-destructive installation. However, on a steel-string acoustic bridge, you do need to file a bit off the treble end of the saddle to leave an exit gap for the pickup. The preamp mounts on the treble-side 'wing' of the bridge, using sticky pads and Velcro. It's

SH NFX-AC	TEST RESULTS
Build quality	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★
■ <b>WE LIKED</b> Simple installation; quality tone; lightweight	
■ <b>WE DISLIKED</b> Preamp box occasionally gets in the way, and makes quite a thump when you hit it; not really an attractive addition to your soundboard	

The 'magnetic sound' is most evident if you play percussively with the Prestige, but string balance is great and all the intricacies of your playing are captured

so light it won't affect tone, and it won't devalue your instrument unless its stick-on pads affect vintage finishes. Despite its size, it's still a bit unsightly, and its placement will occasionally cramp your playing style.

Based on Shadow's patented Nanoflex technology, this system's pickup is only a millimetre thick. Its multi-layered structure incorporates an extremely thin PVDF piezoelectric foil sensor that responds to both pressure (strings) and vibration (soundboard), and is particularly flexible. The miniature preamp incorporates so-called 'Nanoelectronics' and is attached directly to one end of the pickup, ensuring a healthy, low-impedance output that you can plug straight in with. The volume knob's a bit fiddly, but then at least you've got one.

**SOUNDS:** Despite the quirks of our Vintage V1100 test guitar, the SH NFX-AC's basic non-EQ'd performance is as good as any quality under-saddle system. It delivers a solid, full-bodied and generally balanced tone, with negligible background noise and plenty of output, and you do get a sense of the acoustic character coming through. On this review set-up the bottom end

SH 145 PRESTIGE	TEST RESULTS
Build quality	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★
■ <b>WE LIKED</b> Crisp and detailed sound, not as heavy as other similar soundhole pickups and great value	
■ <b>WE DISLIKED</b> Let down by fiddly clamps that don't open wide enough for some thick-lipped soundholes	

actually sounds a bit light, which is most likely an installation issue and not a pickup issue.

However, accidentally whack the preamp, jack plug or the section of pickup sticking out from the saddle, and you realise you've got a lot of vibration/touch sensitive gubbins to avoid.

Verdict

The SH 145 Prestige's obvious 'rival' in the UK market is Takamine's Tri-Ax pickup, and we'd have no hesitation recommending the Shadow as a worthy alternative. If not quite as satisfyingly designed, it still delivers excellent value for money and sounds as impressive.

If you specifically want an under-saddle system on your acoustic guitar, but really don't want to drill any holes in it, then the SH NFX-AC is an affordable solution that really works. However, if you love the look of your instrument, you probably won't want even a little box stuck to your bridge. **G**

Shadow SH 145 Prestige

Guitarist RATING ★★★★★

Shadow SH NFX-AC

Guitarist RATING ★★★★★

SHADOW SH 145 PRESTIGE

**PRICE:** £119 (includes two leads and cable tie)  
**ORIGIN:** Germany  
**TYPE:** Active humbucking magnetic soundhole pickup with volume control  
**DIMENSIONS:** 27 (w) x 110 (l) x 40mm (d)  
**CONNECTIONS:** 3.5mm output jack socket. 3.66m x 4mm guitar cable provided (3.5mm jack to 6.35mm jack) for temporary installations and a 560mm x 3mm cable provided for permanent installations (3.5mm jack to pre-wired endpin jack socket)  
**POWER:** 3V lithium coin-size battery – one year lifetime with average usage  
**WEIGHT (g/oz):** 100/3.5  
**COLOURS:** Titanium (as reviewed) and black  
**JHS**  
**0113 286 5381**  
**www.shadow-electronics.com**

SHADOW SH NFX-AC

**PRICE:** £109 (includes one lead and a cable tie)  
**ORIGIN:** Germany  
**TYPE:** Flexible under-saddle pickup and integrated miniature preamp w/ volume control, designed for mounting on bridge  
**DIMENSIONS:** Pickup 104 (l) x 2.4 (w) x 1mm (d); preamp 43 (l) x 33 (w) x 12.5mm (d)  
**CONNECTIONS:** 3.5mm output jack socket. 3.66m x 4mm guitar cable (3.5mm jack to 6.35mm jack) provided.  
**POWER:** 3V lithium coin-size battery – one year lifetime with average usage  
**WEIGHT (g/oz):** 23/0.8

The rivals

SH NFX-AC	
LR Baggs Element Active	£119
Fishman Ellipse VT	£145
Headway Snake 2	£89
Other systems need a couple of holes drilled, and are trickier to install, but are hidden. Baggs' basic system combines the Element under-saddle pickup with an endpin preamp, and has a removable soundhole-mounted volume control. Fishman's stealthy system combines its standard Matrix pickup with the soundhole-mounted Ellipse preamp, offering tone, volume, phase and switchable voicing. Headway's Snake combines its 360-degree sensing coaxial cable pickup with an inline preamp	