

V For Victory

Launched at the start of 2018, Taylor's V-Class bracing is now available throughout its range. Here we catch up with a classic complete with a brand-new engine

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TAYLOR 714CE V-CLASS £3,359

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What We Want To Know

1

Do all Taylors now use this new bracing system?

No. The V-Class bracing was premiered on a quartet of high-end Grand Auditorium (GA) models at the start of 2018. New V-Class models have been added – again GAs only – from the 800 series down to the start-up 300 series.

2

So you can buy the 714ce in both standard and V-Class bracing?

Yes and no. The specific V-Class models have replaced the previous standard-braced versions in the Taylor line-up but, obviously, there are plenty of stores with the previous standard-braced models in stock.

3

Will V-Class change our world?

Probably not, but Taylor clearly believes it's a better guitar with enhanced dynamic range, projection and improved intonation. A better tool? We're not disagreeing.

Taylor launched its V-Class bracing in a typically well-managed media campaign to coincide with NAMM 2018 back in January – fitting for one of the biggest stories in the acoustic guitar world for quite some time. We covered the launch story back in issue 430, but fast forward to the late summer this year and there's been considerable progress with the V-Class braced models now featuring from Taylor's US-made 300 series upwards. If there was any doubt that V-Class ushered in a new chapter for Taylor, that's been completely scotched. Ever the innovator, Taylor simply refuses to look backwards to move forwards.

To recap, V-Class bracing is a replacement for the time-honoured X-brace. Two main braces, laid out in a V shape, start either side of the soundhole and run down to the end block. A main cross brace sits below the soundhole – easily visible through the soundhole – while four additional braces fan out either side of those main V'd braces, below the bridge. That's it. Aside from checking the soundhole, the main identifier for V-Class is simply the black graphite nut, visibly angled back braces and here – compared to our standard-braced 714ce – an additional 'Reflections' headstock inlay. There is also a new inner label, which for the first time, features the signature of



1. Taylor's ES2 electro system places the piezo transducer behind the saddle rather than underneath it. The three small bolts allows slight response adjustment



One of the identifiers of the new V-Class braced guitars is a black graphite nut. Also, our 714ce V-Class gets an additional 'Reflections' inlay

Andy Powers, Taylor's Master Luthier and the creator of V-Class.

The spruce/rosewood 700 Series, like the majority of Taylor's guitars, already received an Andy Powers makeover back in 2016. It introduced an optional Western Sunburst top, a 'weathered brown' pickguard, multi-ring rosette (featuring Douglas fir, like a 'natural half-herringbone'), which is echoed as purfling inside the Hawaii koa binding.

A new feature that was introduced then (and remains here) is the Lutz spruce top, which according to Taylor has a "naturally occurring hybrid of Sitka and White spruce, which blends the positive characteristics of these woods (and its close cousin, Engelmann spruce) with the robust tonal output of Adirondack spruce. It will respond well to a strong attack."

"In many respects, it's become my favourite spruce," says Andy Powers. "It has

We've consistently failed to find a hair out of place with a Taylor...

power and headroom, but without sounding brash. It doesn't sound brittle and it's not too aggressive. It has a ton of warmth."

He continues: "A lot of times Sitka will sound like a [Fender] Twin Reverb — a superb high-wattage amp, with super-clear headroom, and very powerful, but it can be a little stark. The Lutz spruce has headroom and that power, but the whole sound is broad and warm. It sounds more like a [Fender] Vibroverb or something, where there's plenty of horsepower, with a rich flavour. It tends to give you a little more colour, which

THE RIVALS

On page 18 we look at Martin's Standard Series Reimagined OM-28, an updated classic all-rounder that, in electro option, will cost you (£2,995) with Fishman Aura VT Enhance or LR Baggs' Anthem.

New bracing systems are pretty rare, certainly in the world of the mainstream acoustic guitars. One exception is PRS's hybrid X/Classical bracing that you'll not only find on their ultra high-end Private Stock acoustics, but also the highly affordable, Sitka spruce/figured maple SE A50E (£879) and the Sitka spruce/ovangkol SE A40E (£759), which also feature ebony fingerboards, bone nuts and Fishman's GT1 pickup system.

There is considerable design diversity in the boutique acoustic world, of course, but don't expect a cheap date. The North American Guitar (thenorthamericanguitar.com) is a virtual one-stop shop for a diverse range of boutique acoustics, such as Bourgeois, Casimi, Greenfield and many more.



Martin Standard Series Reimagined OM-28



PRS Sitka SE A50E

I like for the 700 Series because it fits the guitar's identity. It fits the strummer a little better in many cases."

Feel & Sounds

We could waste words here on the build details but we've consistently failed to find a hair out of place with a Taylor, not least at this price level. This V-Class 714ce, and its standard-braced sibling we had for comparison, are both beautifully faultless.

The 714ce is the epitome of Taylor and is known for its clear, articulate voice with generous but rarely boomy lows, crisp contemporary highs and a slightly relaxed midrange. Bundle in the virtual electric-like playability (string gauge aside, of course) and huge consistency and here's one guitar that you can buy with a click of mouse.

Listening first to the standard-braced 714ce, balance is everything and the previous upgrade definitely added a little

The ES2 is controlled, like the previous version, by three low-profile, rubber-knobbed controls for volume, treble and bass



The inside label now features designer Andy Powers' signature – another identifier of the V-Class braced guitars



The 700 series uses a Lutz spruce top paired with rosewood back and sides that's also used on the 800 and 900 Series guitars



As good as the standard model is, the V-Class version seems louder with a wider dynamic range

more oomph in terms of dynamic range and response, which creates a guitar that belts it out when strummed hard, but doesn't lose its life when fingerpicked. But we know that already, right? What does V-Class bring?

Well, if we were A/B'ing this pair in a store, we'd walk out with the V-Class model even if we had no idea of the constructional differences. Why? As good as the standard model is, the V-Class version seems louder with a wider dynamic range. You really can hit this hard and get a result – the standard version didn't seem lacking until we played the V-Class. More generally there appears to be more clarity and depth compared to the standard braced model.

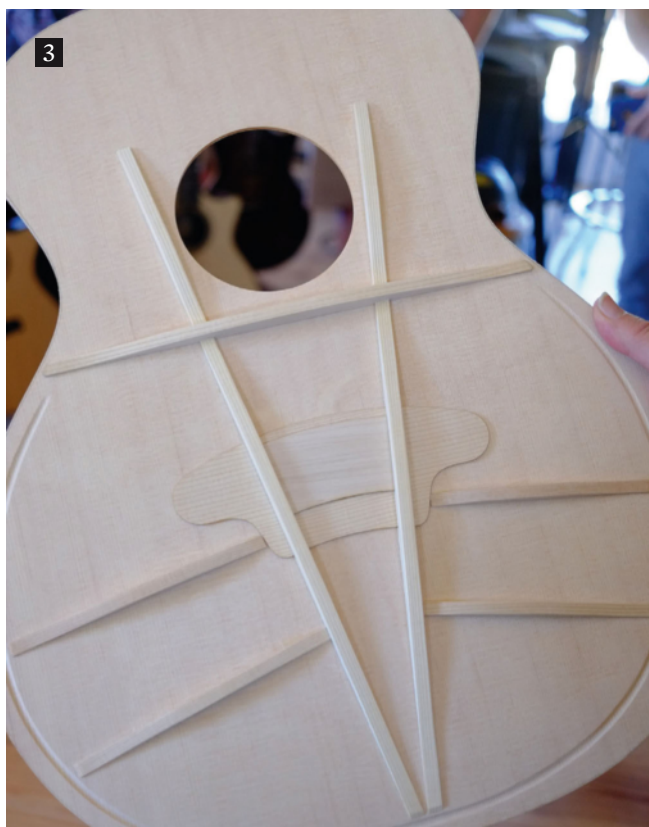
Swapping between the two, the V-Class simply sounds cleaner in the lower mids (but not deficient), but it's in the higher registers that we hear a freer, less constricted ring. As we said in our previous V-Class test, intonation has always been superb on every contemporary Taylor we've played but again – and, yes, it's subtle – V-Class sounds slightly sweeter, more in-tune. Using a Peterson Strobe



V-CLASS: HOW MUCH?

Following on from the quartet of £5k-plus original launch models, which included the 914ce (£6,239) and the PS14ce (£9,479), the good news is you can now experience V-Class braced GAs from £2,219 with the long-standing and well-loved spruce/sapele 314ce. The shaded edgeburst mahogany/Tasmanian blackwood 324ce costs £2,399. Next up is the spruce/African ovankol 414ce (£2,639); the spruce/rosewood 414ce-R is £2,855.

The 514ce (£3,119) uses a fingerstyle-friendly Western red cedar top with mahogany back/sides; the 524ce (£3,239) is all-mahogany. Price-wise, we then jump to our 614ce models – the 614ce (£4,019) uses a torrefied spruce top with maple back/sides, and the 614ce Builder's Edition (£4,199) version (which offers an awful lot, even at this money), adds a beveled armrest, 'refined' cutaway and 'silent' satin finish. At the same price comes the Sitka spruce/rosewood 814ce; the DLX version, at £4,799, adds a rosewood armrest and Gotoh 510 tuners.



2. The multi-ring rosette is typically subtle. It uses herringbone-style Douglas fir and maple. The 'weathered brown' pickguard adds another classy and textural touch

3. It's easy to see where the V-Class name came from, right? Here's a braced top illustrating the design



tuner with both guitars as in-tune as we could get them, depending on what we played, the standard-brace model had us double-checking the tuner. The V-Class just sounds smoother, even when playing quite difficult intervals. As you play across the 'board not least with, for example, a low E root then higher fret partial chords, the V-Class sounds lovely, while the same thing on the standard guitar now seems slightly angular.

Again, the ES2 system is not only hugely simplistic, but seems quicker to dial in a usable sound compared to the standard-braced model seeming to reflect what we're hearing unplugged.

Verdict

Progress and improvement can often seem like dirty words in an industry that can appear to be constricted by its past. If a new build doesn't follow the principles of 'vintage is best' then it can't be any good... Andy Powers hasn't exactly thrown that rule-book out of his workshop window,

The V-Class just sounds smoother, even when playing quite difficult intervals

but he has actually installed a few more vintage-y attributes right across the Taylor line in both sound and appearance. So the V-Class doesn't create a new horizon sound, as such, but it does enhance and improve what was already a cornerstone Taylor model. And that's whether you're a cowboy-chord strummer or a new-age fingerstyle percussive maestro.

As we got used to the guitars (even over a relatively short play-test time), what initially sounded like quite a subtle difference between the V-Class and the standard-braced model, became much more profound. It mirrors our thoughts from our initial V-Class test – it's simply a better tool. **G**



TAYLOR 714CE V-CLASS

PRICE: £3,359 (inc case)

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: 14-fret grand auditorium-size cutaway electro acoustic

TOP: Solid Lutz spruce with V-Class bracing and relief route

BACK/SIDES: Solid Indian rosewood

MAX RIM DEPTH: 117.5mm

MAX BODY WIDTH: 406.5mm (16")

NECK: Tropical mahogany

SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")

TUNERS: Individual Taylor logo'd – nickel-plated

NUT/WIDTH: Black Graphite/44.75mm

FINGERBOARD: West African ebony, abalone 'Reflections' inlays, 381mm (15") radius

FRETS: 20, medium

BRIDGE/SPACING: West African ebony with compensated Micarta saddle/56mm

ELECTRICS: Taylor Expression System 2 with volume, treble and bass rotary controls

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 2.17/4.77

OPTIONS: Only Western Sunburst top finish (£3,569)

RANGE OPTIONS: See boxout

LEFT-HANDERS: Yes

FINISH: Natural gloss body, satin neck, as reviewed



9/10

PROS: Typically fine-detailed build, all-round performance acoustically and plugged-in that's enhanced by V-Class bracing

CONS: Not all of us have £3.5k to spend, and it's probably even more important with these V-Class models to play the different series GAs to really find your fit