

First Impressions © First Impressions  
Slot-heads with a look that's deceptive, sound-wise



Price: £199



**Roots-approved slot-heads with a choice of plain mahogany or, for fifty quid more, swirly bubinga... but does that fancy-looking grain come at added cost? Review by Jerry Uwins**

# Tanglewood

## TW130 & TFA-XB Folk Acoustics

There always seems to be new-model activity within Tanglewood's extensive catalogue, and the start of this year has the Premier Series taking on a distinct retro slant, with the all-mahogany TW130 OM style, while the recently introduced 'Exotics' within the Evolution Series has the similarly-sized TFA-XB. Both are a little unusual - they're 14-fretters with slotted headstocks.

### TW130

Though far from being a copy, the TW130 is strongly influenced by Martin's all-mahogany 15 Series, whose price-conscious, no-frills approach was spurred by the years of austerity during the Depression and Second World War. As it happens, however, Martin didn't make an auditorium-size version, the 000-15, until the series' reintroduction in 1996. Earlier 15s were smaller-bodied instruments.

Remarkably, given its sub-£200 tag, the TW130 manages to offer a solid top and back, and we're told that the laminated sides are genuine mahogany too, including the third 'in-between' ply. The body helps to offset this constructional largesse by carrying no binding; there's no adornment save for a simple herringbone rosette, and the whole guitar is satin lacquered, though grain-filled for a smooth finish. The shape of the body, while similar to a Martin 000 or OM, is in fact half-an-inch wider, at 15.5" across the lower bouts. Maximum rim depth is a generous 113mm.



Solid mahogany tops are rarely as loud as spruce ones but often give a dry, warm and nicely bluesy sound



Logo echoes a vintage Martin back-of-headstock 'brand'. Tuners might benefit from an upgrade

## The TW130 is influenced by Martin's 15 Series, whose no-frills approach was spurred by the years of austerity

With a full 648mm scale length, the slot-headed mahogany neck is a one-piece affair save for an extra portion of wood for the heel - something that's unusual at the price. The span is of regular width with a decent 55mm string spacing at the bridge, and the comfortable medium-depth 'C' profile hints appealingly at a traditional grip. The only detractors on this smartly turned out instrument are slight indents along

### FACTFILE

#### TW130

**Description:** Premier Series folk-size acoustic. Made in China

**Price:** £199

**Build:** Solid mahogany top and back, laminated mahogany sides. Slot-head mahogany neck with 20-fret unbound rosewood fingerboard. Rosewood bridge, chrome open-gear tuners, bottom strap button

**Options:** All-mahogany TW133 slot-head parlour (£249)

**Left-handers:** No

**Finish:** Satin natural

**Scale length:** 648mm/25.5"

**Neck width:**

Nut 43mm

12th fret 53.5mm

**Depth of neck:**

First fret 22mm

9th fret 23mm

**String spacing:**

Nut 36mm

Bridge 55mm

**Action as supplied:**

12th fret treble 1.7mm

12th fret bass 2.5mm

**Max rim depth:** 113mm

**Max body width:** 394mm

**Fingerboard radius:** 16"

**Weight:** 1.91kg/4.2lb

### FINAL SCORE

**Build Quality** .....16 20

**Playability** .....18 20

**Sound** .....18 20

**Value for money** .....20 20

**Vibe** .....15 20

**TOTAL** .....87%

**Good for...** Giving priority to a decent sound rather than dressy looks

**Look elsewhere...** For more cosmetic bang per buck; smoother-gear tuners

Price: £249

**FACTFILE****TFA-XB**

**Description:** Evolution Exotic Series folk-size acoustic. Made in China

**Price:** £249

**Build:** All-laminate bubinga-veneer body. Slot-head mahogany neck with 20-fret maple-bound rosewood fingerboard. Rosewood bridge, chrome three-on-a-plate semi-enclosed tuners, bottom strap button

**Options:** All-bubinga TSF-CE-XB cutaway electro (£329) with Fishman Ion-T system

**Left-handers:** No

**Finish:** Satin natural

**Scale length:** 648mm/25.5"

**Neck width:**

Nut 43mm

12th fret 54mm

**Depth of neck:**

First fret 21mm

9th fret 24mm

**String spacing:**

Nut 35.5mm

Bridge 55mm

**Action as supplied:**

12th fret treble 2.1mm

12th fret bass 2.4mm

**Max rim depth:** 101mm

**Max body width:** 393mm

**Fingerboard radius:** 16"

**Weight:** 2.11kg/4.65lb

**Contact:** EMC

01959 571600

www.tanglewoodguitars.co.uk



Fancy matching head facing, but ignore the logo... future models will have a simple 'T' logo like the TW130



That extra money gets you laminated bubinga plus maple binding around the body, neck and headstock

## With its mixture of swirly, stripey figuring the satin-finished laminated bubinga offers an attractive eyeful

the edges of the unbound fingerboard where the tang ends are, fret tops that need more polishing for silkier bends, and a couple of very stiff tuners. These are unbranded open-back Waverly-style - which look the part - but a few extra quid spent in production for a set of Grover Sta-Tites wouldn't have gone amiss. I've always found those utterly reliable.

### SOUNDS

It may be plainly-adorned, but the fairly deep rims help give the TW a sound that's vibrant and responsive, with an open tone that blends well-balanced highs with a warm, slightly dry, earthy timbre often characteristic of an all-mahogany build. Add in some nice attacking low-end snap when picked hard, and it's a sound that belies the modest price.

### TFA-XB

Evolution Exotics come in various timbers; this one's body is described as laminated bubinga. It's plywood for sure, but the bubinga - sometimes called African rosewood, though not of the same species - is used only for the outer veneers. The inward laminates are mahogany or similar, and the same probably applies to the invisible third ply. Still, with its mixture of swirly and stripey figuring, the satin-finish bubinga offers an attractive eyeful, enhanced by the multi-ply-purpled maple binding, also used for the back's centre strip. The pearl-inlaid rosette is an attractive touch and a tortie pickguard, though not fitted, is supplied in the box should you wish to stick it on. The body profile

is not dissimilar to the TW's and the lower-bout span is roughly the same, but it's a touch slimmer across the shoulders, and the rims are shallower at 101mm.

On a mahogany neck of similar proportions, scale and string spacing to the TW's - though this time scarf-jointed at the headstock - we find maple binding that continues around the peghead, which has a gloss-lacquered bubinga facing and carries three-on-a-plate Kluson-style tuners which work smoothly. The well-fitted fretting is nicely polished - no scratchy tops - and the standard of finishing is very good. The sideways Tanglewood logo on the headstock looks rather shoehorned between the two slots, but future shipments will adopt the simple 'T' motif as on the TW's peghead. A more elegant solution, we reckon.

### SOUNDS

Even allowing for the TFA's shallower body, its sound is at best only polite. The dynamic range is limited, especially from the low strings, so volume and projection are barely average for the body size. On the plus side, the tone is smooth and quite sweet, and sustain is pretty good. However, this does seem to be an instance where an all-laminate construction is inhibiting the guitar from being a rewarding acoustic.



### VERDICT

The deciding factor here is clearly looks versus sound. Plain and sombre the TW130 might appear, but it's a cracking folksy performer for the dosh - in fact, it's a bit of a snip. The TFA-XB is also keenly priced and comes all dressed up and ready to party, but regrettably this guitar doesn't really deliver in the all-important sound department. ➔

### FINAL SCORE

<b>Build Quality</b> .....	17	20
<b>Playability</b> .....	18	20
<b>Sound</b> .....	14	20
<b>Value for money</b> .....	16	20
<b>Vibe</b> .....	10	20
<b>TOTAL</b> .....	75	100
Good for... Nice neck, well-applied fancy trim		
Look elsewhere... More sound, freer dynamics		

**THE COMPETITION**
**VINTAGE**  
**V300MH**

Satin-finish concert-style folk in all mahogany with solid top. Spade peghead carries diecast tuners

**RRP:** £179

**CORT**  
**LUCE L450C**

Another satin, all-mahogany concert model with a solid top and back. Features include abalone rosette and Grover Sta-Tite tuners

**RRP:** £279

**GARRISON**  
**AGGC300**

All-ash body with quilt top lends an exotic touch to this gloss-finish grand concert. Comes in red, blue or black

**RRP:** £239