





TANGLEWOOD

TPE SF DLX

If mahogany is a good thing, then surely flamed mahogany is even better - and this folk-sized Tanglewood adds a pickup and a cutaway, too. Review by **Rick Batey**

This month we're parachuting in on the 'Premier' section of Tanglewood's vast and somewhat tangled catalogue.

The Premier guitars - and there are eight other categories besides that one - basically break down into four sub-sections: plain Premier (nine models, all in spruce and laminated mahogany with satin finishes); Historic (four of 'em, all echoing Martin's 15 series with solid mahogany tops, laminated mahogany back and sides and satin finishes); Premier SE (six models, upgraded with solid Engelmann spruce tops plus a variety of exotic laminated backs and sides, but still with a satin finish); and finally Premier DLX... just two guitars, a cutaway dreadnought and the Super Folk we have for review this month, with solid Engelmann spruce tops, laminated flamed mahogany back and sides, and gloss finishes. All clear? That's good.

The Super Folk is Tanglewood's pitch at a comfortable, do-it-all design: it's compact, even more so than a 14-fret 000, and it has a cutaway, plus a pickup; everything you need, on the face of it, for writing, recording and plugging in at the local open mic session, or beyond. Flip this model over and you're confronted by an absolute sea of flamed figuring but, as we've said, this isn't maple, the most commonly-seen source of such extreme curl in guitarland, but



Second strap button comes ready-fitted



Sealed tuners and a carved neck volute

The all-gloss TPE SF DLX has flamed mahogany laminate back and sides plus a nicely-grained Engelmann spruce top

rather a flamed variant of mahogany (or, at least, the outermost layer of the laminate is flamed mahogany). The colour is unusual and rather attractive; bare mahogany generally has a pinkish light brown colour but here the back, sides and neck have all been stained a slightly grey or olive hue that recalls certain kinds of 'oak' stain you can buy in hardware stores. It's a very different look to the rich red or dark brown

usually applied over mahogany, and it does stand out from the crowd.

The Engelmann spruce top is nicely grained with just a touch of bearclaw here and there; Engelmann has a reputation of sounding sweet and open, particularly suiting fingerpickers as opposed to thick-plectrum blasters, so we'll see how that works out. The soundhole ring is a single band of abalone, and the binding (front

FACTFILE

TANGLEWOOD TW45 EG E

DESCRIPTION Mini jumbo-sized electro-acoustic. Made in Korea
PRICE £599.95

BUILD Solid spruce top with laminated flamed mahogany back and sides, ABS binding, mahogany neck, rosewood fingerboard, sealed tuners, Fishman Sonitone pickup system with INK 3 preamp
LEFT-HANDERS No
FINISH Gloss all over

SCALE LENGTH 650mm/25.6"
NECK WIDTH
Nut 43mm
12th fret 53.5mm
DEPTH OF NECK
First fret 20.5mm
Ninth fret 23mm
STRING SPACING
Nut 35mm
Bridge 55mm
ACTION AS SUPPLIED
12th fret treble 2.6mm
12th fret bass 2.8mm
WEIGHT 1.86kg/4.1lbs

CONTACT Tanglewood
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tanglewoodguitars.co.uk

**Like this?
 Try this...**

Crafter

GAE-15
 Slightly Taylor-esque satin-finished mid-sized cutaway electro with laminated Dao back and sides, a solid cedar top and an LR Baggs pickup
 RRP **£469**

Dean

Performer Plus
 With a solid spruce top and laminated mahogany back and sides, this all-gloss cutaway mini jumbo has a 3-band EQ preamp with built-in tuner
 RRP **£339**

Aria

FET-Elite
 This cutaway mini-folk comes with an undersaddle pickup and an AEQ-4 preamp. Back and sides are mahogany; the top is laminated too, but it's correspondingly affordable
 RRP **£209**



Cream binding and an abalone rosette



Rosewood bridge with a compensated plastic saddle



Rosewood head facing with pearl logo

and back of body plus the sides of the fingerboard) is ivory-coloured ABS.

The curvy bridge is rosewood, with black plastic pins and a saddle of PPS (polyphenylene sulfide, Google reveals).

The neck feels as slim and as sweet as most Tanglewoods, and the square, Collings-esque headstock features a dart volute and sealed chrome tuners. The board is rosewood with tiny pearl dots, and though the fretwork is good, the nut is a touch tall. So is the 12th fret action of 2.2mm on the top E and 2.9mm on the bottom, but there's plenty of saddle for that to come down.

The pickup is the familiar Fishman Sonitone undersaddle unit, but the control panel is a bit new. This is the Fishman INK 3, and though it has regular features - volume, centre-detented bass, middle, treble, and an onboard push-button tuner - the controls aren't sliders, nor normal knobs, but flush-mounted circles with tiny plastic protrusions which you control with a single finger. The best term we can up with is 'twiddle discs'.

The INK 3 preamp's low-profile and unobtrusive disc controls are designed for single-finger operation

They are low-profile and unobtrusive but, if you're used to a system that requires finger'n'thumb operation, these controls may take a bit of getting used to before you're able to fine-tune with confidence in the heat of battle.

The jack/battery system is also unusual: there's a flexible flap which pivots around the strap button, and when pushed sideways it reveals the PP3 battery, with a clip release system. Opportunity here for sympathetic buzzes, you may think, but there's no evidence of any during the course of this review process.

Sound

With a thick pick, single-note lines sound very reasonable, despite a slight pinginess on the top E that could be eradicated. As you move down the

strings and the move on to play full chords it becomes obvious that this isn't a guitar for those who like their Super Folks to possess any kind of boom. But it's worth checking out if you're looking for lightness in your sonics, as even relative to its small size the tones delivered are on the distinctly airy side. With the solid wood top there's a fair chance the sound will develop as it ages, and if you like it now, you should warm to it even more as the years roll by...

Verdict

On the good side, the TPE SF DLX is a neatly-designed little guitar with a handsome look, plus a good Engelmann top, and with a set-up it should play very nicely. The ergonomics of the INK 3 preamp won't be to everyone's tastes, but it does offer improved functionality over the vol/tone soundhole wheels commonly partnered with Fishman's Sonitone pickup. As stated in the *Sounds* section, this model's particular tonal characteristics won't be for everyone. But it's well worth giving it a spin to see if it works for you. If it does, it might well be a partnership that goes the distance.



New Fishman preamp has a 90 hour battery life

FINAL SCORE

TANGLEWOOD TPE SF DLX	
Build Quality	17 / 20
Playability	16 / 20
Sound	15 / 20
Value for money	16 / 20
Looks	17 / 20
TOTAL	81%