

Finely honed homages to yesteryear



Big necks are going to be all the rage in 2011, and Tanglewood is getting in on the act with some generously chunky-feeling Historic guitars. Review by Jerry Uwins

Tanglewood

TW40D-AN & TW40SD-VS Historic

Tanglewood already offers an extensive catalogue of budget and mid-price acoustics, and the choice has just become even wider with the recent addition of a concise line-up of Historic models. Presently linked to the Sundance Series, though possibly soon to become a series in their own right, the Historics comprise three body styles: a Martin-style dreadnought and a J-style slope-shoulder dread both under review here, plus a 000. All three are optionally available as Fishman-powered electros. The Historic moniker relates to more than the guitars' cosmetic approach - they've also got all-new neck profiles.

TW40D-AN

Since the style of neck is a key element of the Historics, it's good place to start on this full-scale, square-shouldered big box. We're in airy picking territory for one thing, with a semi-wide nut span of 44.5mm and a generous string spacing at the bridge of nearly 57mm. The other attribute is a pretty full grip, the soft-V'd profile kicking off at 22.5mm in front of the peghead's diamond volute, deepening to over 25mm before the heel turn. Add all this to a span that broadens a fair amount towards the octave, and you have a pretty uncompromising configuration. Having said that, it's a fine player once you've adjusted to it, and it's entirely in keeping with the instrument's 'historic' remit. The body-matching gloss lacquer provides a slick touch, and it's worth noting that



A cool dalmatian pickguard adds a pleasing 1930s atmosphere to the TW40D-AN dreadnought



The top is solid, but the back and sides are laminated. A strap button in the heel is a thoughtful touch

The TW40D is a willing performer with plenty of punch and projection, and it feels comfortably at home whether strumming or picking

aside from a separate heel portion, the neck's mahogany is a one-piece affair. The heel carries a second strap button - not an historic requirement but a very useful hardware inclusion that also applies to our slope-shoulder model. The T40D's trim is simple yet elegant. The cream-bound solid spruce/laminated mahogany body - finished in antique natural, hence the 'AN' suffix - carries an amber ageing toner on the top, the

FINAL SCORE	
Build Quality	19/20
Playability	16/20
Sound	17/20
Value for money	17/20
Vibe	17/20
TOTAL	86%
Good for... authentic retro handful, cosmetic taste, pleasing sound	
Look elsewhere... for a slimmer, shallower neck	

FACTFILE

TW40D-AN

Description: Dreadnought acoustic. Made in China

Price: £469

Build: Solid spruce top and laminated mahogany back/sides. Mahogany neck, 20-fret rosewood fingerboard. Rosewood bridge, bone nut and saddle, open-back tuners, two strap buttons

Options: TW40D-ANE electro with Fishman Sonitone (£549)

Left-handers: No

Finish: Gloss antique natural

Scale length: 650mm/25.6"

Neck width:

Nut 44.5mm

12th fret 56

Depth of neck:

First fret 22.5mm

9th fret 25mm

String spacing:

Nut 37.5mm

Bridge 56.5mm

Action as supplied:

12th fret treble 2.4mm

12th fret bass 2.6mm

Max rim depth: 121mm

Max body width: 397mm

Fingerboard radius: 16"

Weight: 1.93kg/4.25lb

THE COMPETITION

BLUERIDGE

BR140 HISTORIC

Amber-tint top, dalmatian-tortie pickguard, open tuners and ornate headstock inlaywork

RRP: £469

RECORDING KING

RD26

One-piece V-profile neck with diamond volute, open-geared tuners and snowflake markers

RRP: £369

CRAFTER

DV200/N

45mm fingerstyle neck with herringbone soundhole rosette and amber-buttoned tuners

RRP: £479

Note: All the above are all-solid spruce/mahogany

Price: £469

FACTFILE

TW40SD-VS

Description: Slope-shoulder dreadnought acoustic. Made in China

Price: £469

Build: Solid spruce top, laminated mahogany back and sides. Mahogany neck with 20-fret unbound rosewood fingerboard. Rosewood bridge, bone nut and saddle, open-back nickel tuners, two strap buttons

Options: TW40SD-VSE electro with Fishman Sonitone system (£549). Other Historic debuts are two solid spruce/mahogany 000s - TW400-AN (£469) and electro TW400-ANE (£549)

Left-handers: No

Finish: Gloss vintage sunburst

Scale length: 650mm/25.6"

Neck width:

Nut 44.5mm

12th fret 56mm

Depth of neck:

First fret 23mm

9th fret 25mm

String spacing:

Nut 37.5mm

Bridge 57mm

Action as supplied:

12th fret treble 2.3mm

12th fret bass 2.5mm

Max rim depth: 122mm

Max body width: 403mm

Fingerboard radius: 16"

Weight: 1.98kg/4.35lb

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The solid sitka top is finished with a nice take on Gibson's distinctive small-pattern vintage sunburst



A straight-topped headstock is an oddity on a slope dread but the open-geared machineheads look the part

The TW40SD is maybe a little softer-edged in the attack, but the chances are that in a blindfold test you couldn't tell them apart

pickguard is see-through tortie-plastic redolent of the 'dalmatian' type used on Blueridges, and the rosewood-faced spade headstock - with vintage, squared-off top corners rather than the softer profile of other Tanglewoods' - totes a period-appropriate set of unbranded, Waverly-style open-geared tuners.

Position markers on the unbound rosewood fingerboard are tasteful pearloid micro-dots. Save for fret ends that could do with a touch more rounding off, the presentation and standard of finishing are very smart indeed.

SOUNDS

The guitar is a willing performer. It has the requisite dread punch and projection, the dynamics are supple despite the taut string tension, and there's a pleasing fluidity of warmth in the lows and a nice singing quality to the sustainful, bright yet well balanced highs. It's an instrument that feels and sounds as comfortably at home whether strumming or picking.

TW40SD-VS

From Martin-like territory we move to the slope-shoulder fella, with a body profile inspired by the elegant Gibson J-45, as often referred to as an Advanced Jumbo as it is a dreadnought. Aside from its rounded shouldering and broader, subtler waisting, the TW40SD measures, at just under 16", a quarter-inch or so wider across the lower bouts than the TW40D. Build again comprises a solid spruce top and laminated mahogany back and sides, the top this time treated to a handsome dark vintage sunburst, and the

back and sides stained to a dark red-brown. Buffing of the all-gloss finish is excellent. The soundhole rosette is similar to the other guitar's, but the black/cream purfling around the top adds an extra ply to give a slightly wider-bound look. The pointy-ended scratchplate is an opaque red-brown tortie plastic; the traditional belly bridge with its ivory-colour pins is a component shared by both instruments, as are their bone nuts and saddles.

Save for a black peghead cap and a darker stain under the gloss lacquer, the neck is a dead ringer of the TW40D's, though with a shade more depth under the first position. The result, then, is once more a trad, fingerstyle-friendly feel. The higher-position depth might initially feel a touch daunting but it soon proves to be an obliging player of its type.

SOUNDS

This guitar's sound is closely comparable with its stablemate's. It's maybe a little softer-edged in the attack, and the low end perhaps isn't quite as warmly forthcoming, but the overall timbre is broadly similar and equally likeable, and chances are that in a blindfold test you mightn't tell the two instruments apart.

VERDICT

A dread, a slope and a 000 are three very well-chosen models for Tanglewood to use for their initial Historic series. In theory both our review guitars lose out against some similar-priced and cheaper



all-solid-wood rivals, but in light of their accomplished performance, high-quality build and handsome old-fashioned appeal, the laminated back and sides don't deserve to be a deal-breaker. Neither do their necks, because they're central to the whole Historic exercise: getting a vintage grip on things. In that context, these guitars work admirably. ⚡

FINAL SCORE	
Build Quality	19/20
Playability	16/20
Sound	16/20
Value for money	17/20
Vibe	17/20
TOTAL	85%
Good for... as TW40D-AN, and slope-shoulder styling is always a favourite	
Look elsewhere... as TW40D-AN	

THE COMPETITION

MARINER

JX-65B

All-solid-wood build with vintage sunburst top. Comes with maple body and neck bindings and open-back tuners

RRP: £485

BLUERIDGE

BG-40

In tobacco sunburst with laminated back/sides. Includes diamond/snowflake neck markers and vintage tuners

RRP: £449

OZARK

3392

Budget choice in dark honey sunburst, again with laminated back and sides and tulip-buttoned machineheads

RRP: £280

Note: All the above are spruce/mahogany