

# OVERWATER BY TANGLEWOOD TOJ2 4 TBK

PRICE  
£579.95

A collaboration between two UK companies seeks to bring a high-quality bass to the masses without cutting corners. Mike Brooks assesses whether the concept has been successful

Ever since the late '70s, the Overwater brand has been revered in bass circles for its use of exquisite timbers, its high standard of craftsmanship, and an ability to create product ranges that are the first-call instruments for many session players the world over. In an attempt to offer a range of instruments that are less exclusive and limited in number, and more pocket-friendly to the majority of bass players while retaining the general build ethos attributed to the top-end ranges, Overwater has teamed up with Tanglewood Guitars here in the UK to bring this vision to light. Incorporating three ranges from the Aspiration series and two from the 'J' series, this joint venture aims to make a serious dent in the mid-price market, where affordability, styling, features and playability share equal importance. So has this concept been successfully realised?

## Body & Neck

This example from the Contemporary 'J' series is certainly an understated eye-catcher, with the two-piece flame maple top offering a classy look to the instrument alongside the bleached appearance offered by the maple neck and fingerboard. The two-piece black-stained poplar body feels fairly chunky with a deep body depth all round, but the contouring front and back makes this a comfortable bass to wear and play. Despite the thickness of the body horns and the fairly traditional body shape and styling, access to the upper frets via the lower cutaway is excellent, so should you



All the hardware on the bass has been designed by Overwater

need to access the dusty end of the neck, your access is unhindered.

The maple neck is attached to the body courtesy of a four-bolt attachment, and the pocket looks to be particularly snug and tight-fitting. The neck has been designed with a relatively slim profile, although not quite as slim as a standard Jazz Bass, but slimmer than a StingRay, so there is still a substantial feel to the neck, and the profile continues for the whole length of the neck, making it feel very consistent. The narrow neck width at the nut improves the general playability at that end of the neck, and the satin finish helps to make the whole neck highly playable and comfortable.

The maple fingerboard has a minimal camber and features 22 frets, all of which are well seated and finished with no sharp edges in evidence. Although the fingerboard is a separate piece of timber to the neck, the finishing is very good and well matched, although the join between the two timbers is quite evident at the body end of the neck, but this is a minor point. The

matching black gloss headstock is particularly appealing and contrasts well against the lighter-coloured Overwater moniker, but the real icing on the cake is the colourful abalone position markers, which really make this bass stand out from the crowd.

Despite using lightweight poplar for the body, in terms of weight and balance the bass feels quite heavy, and without using a strap there is some noticeable headstock dive. However, once on a strap, the bass balances nicely and the headstock dive disappears, resulting in a bass that feels sturdy and is openly inviting the player to dig in and unleash their talents.

## Hardware & Parts

When an expensive instrument brand introduces a more cost-friendly variation to market, it is usually the hardware that suffers, but going by the evidence here, Overwater and Tanglewood don't appear to have opted for this approach. The chrome open-gear

machineheads are well attached and operate smoothly, the string tree is well anchored, and the nut looks to be cut very well. The top-loading bridge is Overwater designed (as is all of the hardware) and allows action and intonation adjustments to be made while offering a 19mm string spacing.

The chrome controls (volume, pickup pan, treble and bass) certainly don't feel cheap and operate in a smooth, secure fashion, the EQ and pickup pan controls are centre-detented for reference, while the volume control doubles as a useful bright control via a push/pull facility. The twin-soapbar Overwater pickups have been paired with a John East-designed two-band EQ circuit, but this comes as no surprise as John has been involved with Overwater for some time, his circuits having been used in the full-price ranges for a number of years. Access to the battery is nice and easy due to a flip-top cover, while a quick peek inside the control cavity presents an exceptionally neat and tidy circuit layout, very little extraneous cabling and a well-shielded cavity. The jack socket can be found in its customary position on the side of the bass, following the control line-up on the front face.

## Sounds

Acoustically, the bass has a strong tone with a fair degree of vibrancy and sustain, the bolt-on construction adding an expected 'bounce' to the inherent character of the instrument. Playing the bass unplugged, the player could be forgiven for thinking this is an extremely playable bass that is well





## OVERWATER BY TANGLEWOOD TOJ2 4 TBK

**Price:** £579.95  
**Built in:** J/China  
**Scale length:** 34"  
**Nut width:** 38mm  
**String spacing at nut:** 11mm  
**Body:** Poplar with flame maple top  
**Neck:** Maple  
**Fingerboard:** Maple  
**Frets:** 22  
**Pickups:** 2 x Overwater Soapbars (passive)  
**Controls:** Volume (push/pull bright tone), pickup pan, treble, bass  
**Bridge:** Overwater  
**String spacing at bridge:** 19mm  
**Machineheads:** Deluxe jazz style  
**Weight:** 4.5kg (9.9lb)  
**Finishes:** Translucent black gloss (also available in blue gloss and blue/black burst gloss)  
**Case:** None  
**Left-handers:** Not available

### CONTACT DETAILS

**Tanglewood**  
Tel: 01937 841122  
www.tanglewoodguitars.co.uk  
www.overwaterbasses.com

## GB VERDICT

### GOLD STARS

- ★ Exceptional quality for the price, high level of finishing
- ★ Highly playable and comfortable to wear
- ★ Good tonal palette with a fair degree of flexibility

### BLACK MARKS

- A little on the weighty side.
- Some mid EQ wouldn't go amiss.

### IDEAL FOR...

Those looking for a quality bass at a pocket-friendly price or a superb backup instrument.

**GBRATING**  
★★★★★

## BOTH OVERWATER AND TANGLEWOOD HAVE CERTAINLY GONE THE EXTRA MILE

set up, and certainly a bass worthy of the Overwater name; but is that where the fun ends? Surely, with so many pluses, the electronics and pickups are going to be where this bass falls down.

Guess what ... it doesn't! Plugging in, your attention is drawn to the power of the signal and the thorough, sturdy tone on display, and with the EQ set flat, the bass is perfectly usable as it is. There is a fair deal of clarity on offer, and this is backed up by a core tone with body and character. Although the basic tone isn't particularly throaty, there are enough mid frequencies to give the sound plenty of projection.

Panning between the pickups highlights the differences in tone offered by both pickups, and as expected, the neck pickup has a far bassier, more rounded tone on offer, whereas the neck pickup offers more 'honk' and 'twang'. The two-band EQ is not to be

underestimated, and although it is particularly helpful in adding some power to the bottom end and filling out the sound, adding a little at a time makes sense, thus preventing the tone from becoming overpowered and bloated.

Similarly, adding treble gives the signal more definition and bite, improving the articulation of the notes played; but add too much and the top end can be a little excessive.

John East has certainly provided an EQ that should cater for all playing styles and techniques. Fingerstyle players and pick players may find that they don't need to add too much in the way of EQ, but there is plenty of boost and cut on tap if you require it. The slappers and tappers out there will no doubt look to boost the high end to make their tone stand out, but be sure to investigate the bright facility courtesy of the volume push/pull control before adding any treble EQ, as the bright option significantly increases the percussive capacity of the instrument. Having this level of tonal flexibility at hand shows that both Overwater and Tanglewood have certainly gone the extra mile, although having an extra mid-band EQ would have improved the circuit even further, as very often some form of mid boost or cut can make all the difference to your sound, especially in a band mix.



The tuners operate smoothly

## Conclusion

There is no doubting that both companies have made a serious attempt at giving bassists a top-notch instrument at a price that falls very neatly into the mid-range price bracket. Lakland and Sadowsky took this route some years ago with some success, so it is no surprise that a British luthier has also opted for such a range. In theory, it was certainly possible that cuts would have to be made or cheaper options used in order to reach this price point, but we can say that on this evidence there are no clear signs of any significant 'cheap' options. This particular bass is certainly up to the task and is as flexible tonally as some instruments costing double.

The finishing is of a very high standard throughout, apart from two very small gripes: the neck/fingerboard join already mentioned, and one fret slot on the upper side of the neck has not been filled correctly. But these points aside, this should be a serious consideration for any bassists looking for a new bass or top-notch backup, and at this price you can buy with confidence. **GB**



The neck is bolted on securely



The 22 frets are superbly finished