



## TANGLEWOOD EVOLUTION TW28/ 12 CLN CE

With twice as many strings at a bargain price, Sam Wise finds out if Tanglewood's budget strummer is more playable than the average inexpensive 12-string

Once upon a time, the brand of choice for the cash-strapped acoustic guitarist was EKO, and what those monolithic guitars lacked in high-quality materials, they made up for with an action height you could drive a bus under! The 12-strings in particular required Herculean feats of strength to play, and were the curse of many an inexperienced folkie. Since 1988, Tanglewood has been at the forefront of bringing guitars to market which are not only affordable, but actually playable as well, and the TW28/12 is its budget 12-string offering. Priced at a reasonable £299 with a Fishman Isys pickup, the Evolution is a very realistic choice for the cash-strapped guitarist.

### Body and Neck

The Evolution is a fairly standard cutaway dreadnought of all-laminate construction. The top has a satin-finished cedar veneer and looks appealingly folkie, while the back and sides are veneered

with fairly plain mahogany. Body and neck are bound with maple, which is far more attractive than white plastic, but in this case appears to be rather vulnerable to dirt, the neck binding from where

it joins the body right to the end being noticeably dirty. The substantial rosewood bridge is almost heraldic in shape and carries a split-compensated saddle and 12 white plastic bridge pins

with abalone dot inlays. The soundhole rosette appears to be of the stick-on variety, with concentric white and abalone rings, and the neck has simple abalone dot inlays. Overall, it's a fairly conservative-looking guitar, although the combination of the cedar veneer and that oversize six-a-side headstock should make it stand out sufficiently on the guitar shop wall, and it's generally handsome enough.

Those tuning machines (and boy, do they look like a lot, altogether like that!) are Tanglewood's own Grover clones, stiff but very smooth in operation. Tuning was once the bane of cheap 12-strings, but here the decent tuning machines are complemented by the Fishman Isys T built-in tuner, making it a relative doddle. Interestingly, the Isys head unit is



The Tanglewood features a nicely minimal aesthetic





Tuners are stable and responsive



equipped with such niceties as a phase switch and a 'contour' tone-shaping button, but no user-definable tone controls, only a volume. It connects to a Fishman Sonicore undersaddle piezo, with an endpin jack, and a battery box situated right next to it.

The fact that we find anything to criticise about the build quality of the Tanglewood shows just how far inexpensive guitars have come. In general, the Evolution is well made, neatly jointed and without faults, but the binding does appear dirty and messy in a few places. This is most notable on the neck,

but there's also a maple heelcap with an inlaid abalone T logo on it, which should be a distinctive and attractive feature, but again looks dirty and worn; and the spot where the ends of the back binding join is notable for one end being light and clean and the other looking grubby. It's a shame, as it lets down what is otherwise a fairly handsome guitar, but it could be a one-off.

## Sounds

In the hand, the Evolution is everything you'd expect from a low-end dreadnought: big and bulky but still approachable, and with a slightly chunkier than usual neck profile which alters little from nut to heel. The action, thankfully, is comfortable and low, so that while the string tension still makes playing a bit of a fight for 6-string devotees, it's never the battle that it could have been. Intonation is not 100% perfect: according to the internal tuner, it's still in around

## The brightness of the top end makes it a pleasant player even for fingerstyle

the seventh fret, but flat once you reach the 12th, but it is internally consistent, so chords sound right. The only exception might be if you play in open tunings and are combining strings fretted high on the neck with open strings, but try as we might, we can't find anything that actually sounds jarring.

Of course, if you buy a 12-string it's because you want jangle, and the Evolution provides it in spades; it could be that the simple, direct tone of laminate actually lends itself to 12-string tones. The complex, warm

harmonics of a solid-cedar top can sound muddy when 12 notes are sounding at once, and of course, cedar tends to lose some of its tonal integrity when driven hard, but the all-laminate Evolution suffers none of these issues. What might in a 6-string seem an unsophisticated, one-dimensional tone broadens out in the 12-string into a wonderful jangling richness, where each note is discernible even in strummed chords. The big dreadnought bass is there as you might expect, and the brightness of the top end makes it a pleasant player even for fingerstyle (though you'll need strong fingers, and to adjust your right-hand action a little to make the most of the 12 strings). Plugged in, you get a fairly undistinguished piezo tone, but it's very usable, and after all, it's not a magnificent and complex solid-wood tone we're trying to amplify here.

## Summary

In our experience, many considerably more expensive solid-top instruments can't compete with the tone of this instrument, and it might be necessary to spend many times more to get a real improvement. The Evolution is never going to be a real heartbreaker at this price point, but it is a very capable guitar with a solid, usable tone, both acoustically and amplified, at a bargain price. More than that, it's something that not many years ago didn't exist: a playable, budget-priced 12-string. If you feel a 12-string is your métier, then you could do a lot worse than this; you could take it out and play it live anywhere with confidence, and without selling your house to buy it. **GB**



## The Guitar Tech

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## Technical Specification

**Price:** £299  
**Scale length:** 650mm  
**Nut width:** 43mm  
**Top:** Cedar laminate  
**Back and sides:** Mahogany laminate  
**Neck:** Mahogany  
**Fingerboard:** Rosewood  
**Frets:** 20 medium  
**Bridge:** Rosewood  
**Machineheads:** Tanglewood closed-back tuners  
**Weight:** 2.55kg  
**Finishes:** Natural satin  
**Case:** Not included  
**Left-handers:** No

## Contact Details

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## What We Think

What did our test results reveal?

**Pros:** Competitive price. Very manageable action. Tone works well for a 12-string.

**Cons:** Dirty marks on binding.

**Ideal For:** Folkly strummers!

## GB Rating

Rating out of five stars

Tanglewood Evolution ★★★★★