PRICE: £469

Tanglewood TW40 SD VS

Travelling back in time to a bygone age for another tribute to a classic design, David Mead wields the sonic screwdriver ...

"the SD VS's livery is bling-free – and rightly so - it yells 'workhorse'"

Woods Used

The top is solid spruce, topped with a striking vintage sunburst finish. The back and sides are of laminated mahogany, and the neck, with it's authentic chunky profile, is mahogany topped off with a rosewood fingerboard.

In a previous issue of *Acoustic*, I looked at Tanglewood's take on the Martin Orchestra model in the guise of their TW40 0 AN. This particular guitar is another from that same Historic series, its slope-shouldered jumbo body shape reminiscent of Gibson's legendary J-45.

To briefly recap, the company's mission in its Historic line is to pay homage to some of the most famous acoustic models from the 1940s, often thought of as a golden era for guitar design. In order to achieve a model that coupled good looks with good tone at a very competitive price, Tanglewood called upon the input of Swedish luthier Michael Sandén to oversee the project.

Build Quality

Gibson's J-45 was originally introduced in 1942 at the ripe old price of $45. At the time, the USA was just getting through the Great Depression and the aim was to produce a no-frills workhorse acoustic at a price that even relatively impoverished musicians of the day could afford. It was destined to be a step up from their previous J-35, but retaining many of that particular model's plain-Jane characteristics.

So much for the history lesson, let's take a close look at what the TW40 SD VS has to offer ...

First impressions here are that we're dealing with a very well-established and much-loved body shape. I've found before in conversation with guitar enthusiasts that the J-45 is a bit of a Marmite instrument in that you either love it or hate it. The body looks a little like it wants to be a dreadnought, but those sloped shoulders and bloated belly – not to mention Gibson's own 'J' prefix – confirm it as a jumbo. Another thing that becomes immediately apparent is the depth of the body; I measured it as being 120 mm at its thickest point, which

Waverly-style tuners

Tanglewood TW40 SD VS

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Technical Specification

Manufacturer: Tanglewood
Model: TW40 SD VS
Retail Price: £469
Body Size: Sloped Shoulder Dreadnought
Made In: China
Top: Solid Spruce
Back and Sides: Mahogany
Neck: Mahogany
Fingerboard: Rosewood
Frets: 20
Tuners: Open back Waverly style
Nut Width: 44.5mm
Scale Length: 650mm
Onboard Electronics: N/A (E model available with Fishman Sonitone EQ)
Strings Fitted: Elixir Nanoweb Lighr 11-52
Left Handers: N/A – Possibly in the next 6-12 months
Gig Bag/Case Included: N/A

Contact Details

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www.tanglewoodguitars.co.uk

"I heard a youthful, sparkly brightness with a surprisingly even response across the tonal spectrum"

should translate into volume and projection when we reach the audition stage later on. Despite this girth, the SD VS is quite light and comfortable to hold either sitting or standing – and if the latter is your preferred playing position, you'll be glad to know that Tanglewood have provided a second strap button for your convenience.

Underneath that distinctive sunburst finish we find a solid spruce top, and my only complaint here is that the mock-tortoiseshell pickguard has taken on a sort of mottled effect where it doesn't seem to have made perfect contact with the body. It's a very minor thing but it might be enough to put string-plucking aesthetes off a little!

The back and sides of the instrument are laminated mahogany. When I reviewed the SD VS's stablemate, the O AN I mentioned earlier, I spoke to Michael Sandén who told me that this was in order to keep the retail price below £500. In order to make the body more resonant, however, he told me that he had designed the back bracing so that it was slightly thinner to compensate.

The authentically vintage D-profile chunky neck is mahogany, while the rosewood fingerboard is topped with a headstock sprouting Waverly-style open-back tuners.

What We Think
What did our test results reveal?

Pros: Good looks combined with a very capable tonal palette.

Cons: Up against stiff competition from Epiphone's own J-45 model.

Overall: The TW40 SD VS packs a few surprises, not the least of which is a very good all-round tonal capability.

As I've already said, the original J-45 design was never meant to be in any way opulent or ornate, and so the SD VS's livery is accordingly bling-free – and rightly so: it's an instrument that yells 'workhorse' at you in almost every respect.

Sound Quality

Over many years of reviewing guitars, one conclusion I've drawn is that you can never really be sure what a guitar is going to sound like until you strike that first chord. You can have a pretty good idea, but it's always a case of the proof being in the pudding, so to speak. In the SD VS's case, I was expecting a bit of the muddiness in the lower mid range that I've encountered before in jumbo-sized acoustics. Instead I heard a youthful, sparkly brightness with a surprisingly even response across the tonal spectrum. Furthermore, being a fan of fairly thick necks, I found the SD VS a delight to hold. On a whistle-stop tour of musical styles, I found that it copes well with fingerpicked blues, strummed folk and pretty much everything else I could throw at it. So in this instance, it squares up admirably to its original brief of being an able all-rounder.

The sustain is good too, with chords lingering accordingly and individual notes full of bluesy resonance. As with the 0 AN, there is a version of this guitar available with a Fishman pickup pre-installed, and so effectively all tastes and performance scenarios have been catered for.

Conclusion

My overall opinion of this guitar changed mid review. The more time I spent with it, the more I came to realise that this really is a very nice all-purpose acoustic. Its retail price puts it in direct competition with similar models – like Epiphone's own J-45 – but if you're seeking a guitar that can accommodate virtually any style you can think of, the SD VS should be toward the top of your shopping list.

David Mead

Acoustic Test Results
Our ratings explained

5 Stars: Superb, Almost faultless.
4 Stars: Excellent, Hard to beat.
3 Stars: Good, covers all bases well.
2 or 1 Stars: Below average, poor.

Rating out of five
How well did this guitar fare?

Build Quality	✪✪✪✪
Sound Quality	✪✪✪✪
Value for Money	✪✪✪