


Taylor 710 CE-L9 Short-Scale Dreadnought

A versatile hybrid charmer with vintage-dreadnought whomp, short-scale playability, and state-of-the-art onboard electronics.

by Scott Nygaard



For many of us who discovered the guitar in the 1960s and early '70s, the Martin D-28 defined the sound of an acoustic guitar. For bluegrass flatpickers and roots rhythm players (and even such forward-thinking acoustic icons as Joni Mitchell and Michael Hedges), the bassy whomp of a good D-28 was irresistible and became an essential point to consider when looking for a guitar. Thus, when the first wave of new guitar companies—including Taylor and Larrivée—appeared in the middle and late '70s, touting instruments with a more balanced response, some thought the guitars sounded thin and sterile. They soon realized that our prized dreadnought sound was not really balanced at all, but weighted heavily in the bass. Many of us have come to love the expanded tonal range and contemporary approaches to guitar sound, but some still judge a guitar by how close a strummed G chord sounds to the D-28 ideal. So I'm happy to report that the limited-edition, short-scale 710 CE-L9 dreadnought is the first Taylor I've played that duplicates the vintage D-28's woody boom.

STAGE-READY, SHORT-SCALE VERSATILITY

With the first strummed G chord, my face brightened and I was off, boom-chucking like one possessed, ripping into

G-runs and launching first-position flat-picked leads with abandon. My retro reverie was soon broken, however. The 710 CE-L9 is not a Martin copy. The fingerboard is a bit wider, slowing my pick down a touch, and the short scale makes the strings less taut than the longer scale on Martin dreadnoughts. This made the Taylor easy to play, and great for bending and wiggling strings—even in first position—but I found I didn't want to hit it quite as hard as I would a vintage dread.

OK, what else could it do? As I explored the guitar, playing stretched-out, up-the-neck jazz chords, using my fingers and pick to play an Irish waltz and a folk version of the jazz standard "My Romance," I realized that this guitar's real strong point is its versatility. Coupled with a cutaway and Taylor's Expression System electronics, the 710 CE-L9 will be most loved by guitarists

At a Glance

Taylor 710 CE-L9

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| HIGHLIGHTS | Vintage-dreadnought bass warmth, contemporary playability, and sweet plug-and-play electronics. |
| THE SPECS | Engelmann spruce top. Indian rosewood back and sides. Ebony fretboard and bridge. Tropical American mahogany neck. Scalloped X-bracing. Tusq nut and saddle. Bolt-in neck. Gloss polyester finish. Gold-plated Taylor tuners. Venetian cutaway. 24 7/8-inch scale. 1 3/4-inch nut. 2 3/16-inch string spacing at bridge. Adjustable truss rod. Taylor Expression System electronics. Made in USA. |
| WATCH FOR | Accessing the battery compartment sends the cap flying unexpectedly. |
| THIS IS COOL | Lay into a G chord and you're in vintage heaven; plug in and you've got a stage-ready acoustic-electric. |
| BEST FOR | Performers looking for a dreadnought that satisfies their vintage lust but is versatile enough for myriad styles. |
| PRICE | \$3,298 list (with hard-shell case)/\$2,638 street. |
| MAKER | Taylor Guitars, (619) 258-1207, www.taylorguitars.com. |

new gear

with a wide variety of playing approaches who want to get those styles across onstage.

As for its construction, it's become a cliché to call Taylor's work flawless, but Bob Taylor and Co. are deservedly known for their quality control and I could find nothing that disputed that on this instrument. The rosewood back and sides were gorgeous, and the koa rosette and snowflake fingerboard inlays are nice touches. The gloss finish on the neck gave it a vintage feel, though its thin round shape made it easier to wield than many vintage clubs. The gui-

tar was set up perfectly: not too low, not too high. It was hard to get the strings to buzz no matter how hard I whacked on them, yet my fingers had no trouble getting around in all positions.

NATURAL-SOUNDING, VERSATILE ELECTRONICS

Taylor's Expression System electronics is one of the best onboard amplification systems on the market. Too bad its Rupert Neve-engineered sound is limited to Taylor models. I didn't have the chance to thoroughly explore the ES's

potential through a PA at a gig, but I did try the guitar with a new AER AcoustiCube 3, both into the line input with a standard quarter-inch cable and into the mic input using the supplied balanced TRS-to-XLR cable.

To get a warm sound somewhat reminiscent of a magnetic soundhole pickup but with more sparkle, all I had to do was dial out a little treble on the amp. Plugging in with the TRS/XLR cable produced almost double the gain of the line input, but the tone was a little more electric sounding, even when I dialed it back to the same volume level as the line input. Either way, the ES system provides a plug-and-play sound

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that will suit most guitarists (a couple people passing by as I cranked up the Taylor remarked at how natural it sounded), as well as plenty of tweakability for those who want to shape their sound more distinctively with outboard gear. My only gripe with the system is the battery cap, located just below the endpin jack, which has a tendency to fly from the guitar when removed with a turn. Since it's not attached and removing it makes the system inoperable, you'll want to make sure you don't change batteries on a darkened stage or in a cluttered dressing room.

THE WRAP

It's too early to tell if Taylor's short-scale experiment will be as much of a hit with guitarists as some of the company's other massively popular models, but there will certainly be a lot of guitarists falling in love with these short-scale dreads because of their playability, vintage warmth, and powerful ES electronics. Previously, you'd have to install aftermarket electronics in a vintage or vintage-reissue dread to get this combination of vintage whomp and acoustic-electric sound. But not anymore. ■

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