

GEAR Bench Test



Taylor T5 12-string

TESTED BY MATT BLACKETT

WHEN TAYLOR UNVEILED THE T5 6-STRING IN 2005, they certainly weren't the first company to deliver acoustic and electric tones in one instrument. Taylor's unique approach, however, appealed to enough players that they have decided to double down on that winning hand and release a 12-string version. The result is a great-looking, easy-playing guitar that has the celestial ring and chiminess we love about 12s, as well as a bunch of clever and innovative features.

Opening the T5's cool, faux-gator skin case was reminiscent of a scene from *Pulp Fiction*, as the amazing koa top was so beautiful that it seemed to produce a glow that filled the

room. The rich brown finish further enhances the spectacular grain, and the gold hardware adds just the right amount of blingitude while perfectly complementing the koa. The only thing that seems a tad out of place is the ultra-white binding, which makes the bridge saddle look aged and mellow by comparison. Having said that, the binding is very well done. Rounding out the cosmetics are tasteful fretboard inlays that look kind of like manta rays.

Despite the many cool amplified tones on tap, the first thing I was struck by was how great the T5 12-string sounds acoustically. On the one hand, this shouldn't be surprising, because Taylor makes some amazing acoustics. But the T5's body is only about two inches deep, making the volume and richness it cranks out indeed impressive. Just picking out the intro to "Ticket to Ride" brought editors from both *Keyboard* and *Bass Player* over to see what was creating such a big, sweet noise.

This 12 also plays as good as it sounds. The neck is super comfy, and the action is pretty much as low as it can be without buzzing (which it doesn't). Every person who has played this guitar has uttered some variation on the line, "This has to be the easiest-playing 12-string I've ever played." This is partly due to the nice neck and great setup, but credit also goes to the bitchin' compensated saddle Taylor has devised for the T5 12-string. Easily getting the "Why didn't anyone think of this before?" award, this ingenious saddle not only allows for more precise intonation of all 12 strings, but it also compensates for the *height* discrepancies between the octave strings. That means that the attack on the high-octave strings is more even than on normal 12s, and those skinny little strings don't get lost under your fretting fingers nearly as much. It translates into a more balanced tone, and a positively shredderific 12-string experience.

The T5's control layout is clean and neat with a stealthy 5-position pickup selector on

SPECS | Taylor Guitars, (619) 258-6957; taylorguitars.com

PRICE	\$3,998 retail/\$N/A street
NUT WIDTH	1 ¹¹ / ₁₆ "
NECK	Tropical mahogany
FRETBOARD	24 ⁷ / ₈ "-scale bound ebony with 15" radius
FRETS	21 nickel/silver medium
BODY	Sapele with highly figured Hawaiian koa top
PICKUPS	Two stacked humbuckers (one near the bridge, one hidden under the upper section of the fretboard). Magnetic body sensor (beneath top on lower bout). Bass, Treble, and Master Volume controls; 5-way pickup selector
BRIDGE	Ebony with Taylor's Dual-Compensated Saddle
HARDWARE	Gold-plated Taylor tuners
FACTORY STRINGS	Elixir Anti-Rust Electric Strings for 12-String Guitar, gauged .010, .010, .013, .013, .017, .009, .026w, .012, .036w, .018, .046w, and .026w.
WEIGHT	6.7 lbs
KUDOS	Flawless playability. Big range of tones. Striking good looks.
CONCERNS	None.

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the side, and three rubber knobs on the top. Speaking of stealthy, in addition to the slim bridge humbucker is another pickup located under the fretboard. Also invisible is a magnetic body sensor under the lower

bout for more “acoustic” amplified tones.

Plugging into the clean channel of a Marshall DSL 401 combo, and picking through a couple of chords, instantly showed where the T5’s heart lies. As good



Taylor’s Dual-Compensated Saddle improves intonation and evens out string height.



Inside the T5—the stacked humbucker and 12-string bridge plate are visible in the body cavity.

as this guitar sounds acoustically, it sounds absolutely amazing amplified. Each of the knobs has a handy center detent—which, in the case of the tone controls, makes it easy to know whether you’re boosting or cutting. The Master’s detent seemed odd to me at first, until I began to appreciate the power of this control, and how it can be used to summon more overdriven textures when you roll it clockwise from its center point.

For those who are impatient, I’ll cut to the chase. There isn’t a bad sound on this guitar, and, owing to the well-voiced Bass and Treble controls, it’s capable of a lot more than five tones. With the knobs in their center positions, all the tones sounded sweet and distinct from one another. Putting the pickup selector closest to the neck gives you the combination of neck pickup and body sensor for a sound that’s big, warm, and round. Notching it back to position 2 (neck pickup alone) is clearer and more electric sounding. Position 3 (bridge pickup alone) is the most Beatlesque tone of the bunch, position 4 (neck and bridge in parallel) is punchy

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Gorgeous koa makes the T5 12-string look as great as it sounds.

and jangly, and position 5 (neck and bridge in series) is similar to 4, but fuller.

By experimenting with the Bass and Treble controls, I was able to vary all of the tones in incredibly musical ways. Crank both knobs to bolster the lows and add even more shimmer to the highs. Cut them both, and you get a righteous faux-resonator tone on position 3 that only gets cooler and swamplier when playing with a slide. Great results were

also had with all bass and no treble, and vice-versa. Doing some recording with Cakewalk Sonar added yet another stellar tone to the mix when I stuck a Neumann TLM 127 in front of the T5 for a gorgeous acoustic sound that blended splendidly with all the plugged-in timbres. Wow!

Taylor's stated goal of creating an electric 12-string "that you might actually play for more than one or two songs" is like

damning with faint praise. The T5 12-string is not only the best-sounding, easiest-playing electric 12 I've ever come across (with all due respect to my funky '60s Hagstrom 12), it's one of the finest *instruments* I've played in a long time. You could definitely make this your main guitar, and have a truly unique, inspiring sound. For all these reasons, the T5 12-string easily snags an Editor's Pick Award. 🎸