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GEAR



Taylor

GRAND PACIFIC BUILDER'S EDITION 517E AND 717

TESTED BY ART THOMPSON

THE RECENT INTRODUCTION of the Grand Pacific models heralds an entirely new design from Andy Powers, who has been the head of R&D for Taylor since 2015. These slope-shouldered dreadnoughts are identical in size and shape, and both feature torrefied Sitka spruce tops and V-Class bracing. However, the Builder's Edition 517 has mahogany back and sides, while the Builder's

SPECIFICATIONS

Grand Pacific Builder's Edition 517e

CONTACT taylorguitars.com

PRICE \$2,999 street as tested with ES2 system; \$2,799 street without electronics

NUT WIDTH 1.75", black graphite

NECK Tropical mahogany

FINGERBOARD Ebony, 25.5" scale

FRETS 20

TUNERS Taylor nickel

BODY Tropical mahogany back and sides

TOP Torrefied Sitka spruce with V-Class bracing

BRIDGE Ebony with micarta saddle and ebony bridge pins

ELECTRONICS Taylor ES2

EXTRAS Taylor Deluxe Hardshell Western Floral case included. Silent Satin finish. Available with Natural or Wild Honey Burst top (shown here)

WEIGHT 4.58 lbs

FACTORY STRINGS Elixir Phosphor Bronze Medium

BUILT USA

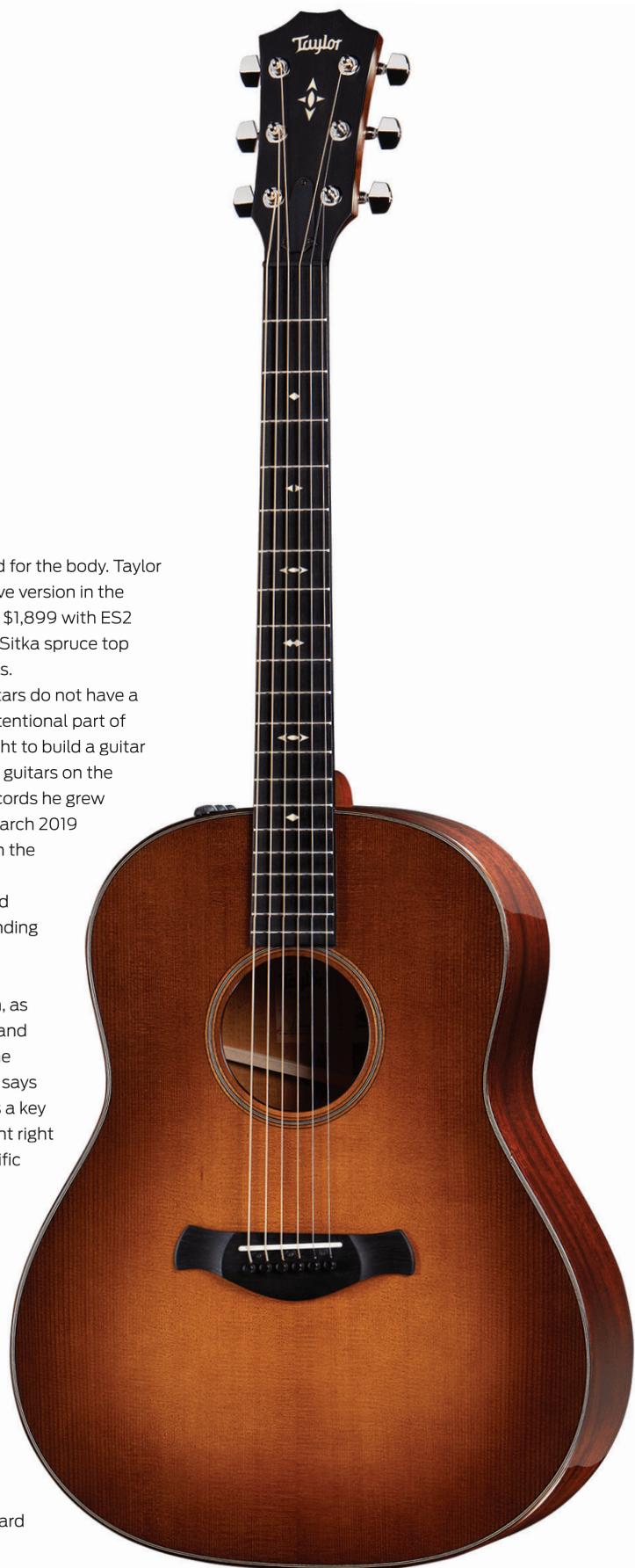
KUDOS Beautiful clarity and warmth. Excellent sustain. Sounds in-tune in all reaches of the fretboard

CONCERNS None

Edition 717 uses rosewood for the body. Taylor also offers a less expensive version in the model 317 (\$1,699 street, \$1,899 with ES2 electronics), which has a Sitka spruce top and sapele back and sides.

The Grand Pacific guitars do not have a cutaway, and this is an intentional part of their design. Powers sought to build a guitar that would sound like the guitars on the country and bluegrass records he grew up listening to (see the March 2019 issue for an interview with the designer about the development of the Grand Pacifics), while understanding how those sounds were affected by the mics that were used to record them, as well as compression, EQ and everything else done in the mastering phase. Powers says a symmetrical shape was a key element in getting the right right voicing for the Grand Pacific guitars, which meant the guitars could have no cutaway or armrest bevel. The round shoulders also give the Grand Pacific models a classic look that underscores what he was aiming for in the first place.

As Builder's Edition models, the 517 and 717 feature chamfered edges on the body, rolled fretboard edges, and a new



compound-carve neck profile that is slightly more V shaped toward the nut and flatter higher up to accommodate adjustments in hand position when moving up and down the neck. The careful fret dress and spot-on factory setup make for excellent playability, and the Silent Satin finish gives the woods a worn-in texture that is very appealing. The rounded neck heel is another element that differentiates the Grand Pacific from other Taylors, and the ebony bridge has smooth contours for a nice feel under your picking hand. The classy appointments include mother-of-pearl Arrowhead inlays on the fretboard and peghead (717 only; the 517 has grained ivoroid inlays), sapele binding on the body, and a lovely wooden rosette with black and white inner rings.

The 517e on review here is equipped with the Taylor ES2 pickup system. However, electronics are optional and our review 717 arrived without the ES2 package. These guitars both have excellent acoustic

SPECIFICATIONS

Grand Pacific Builder's Edition 717

CONTACT taylorguitars.com

PRICE \$2,899 street as tested, with Natural top and no electronics. \$3,099 street with ES2 system

NUT WIDTH 1.75", black graphite

NECK Tropical mahogany

FINGERBOARD Ebony, 25.5" scale

FRETS 20

TUNERS Taylor, nickel

BODY Indian rosewood back and sides

TOP Torrefied Sitka spruce with V-Class bracing

BRIDGE Ebony with micarta saddle and ebony bridge pins

ELECTRONICS None as tested. Optional Taylor ES2

EXTRAS Taylor Deluxe Hardshell Western Floral case included. Silent Satin finish. Available with Natural or Wild Honey Burst top (shown here)

WEIGHT 4.74 lbs

FACTORY STRINGS Elixir Phosphor Bronze Medium

BUILT USA

KUDOS Superbly detailed tone. Excellent sustain. Sounds in-tune in all reaches of the fretboard

CONCERNS None

performance, and they play solidly in-tune in all regions of the fretboard thanks in large part to the V-Class bracing. Another benefit of V bracing is enhanced sustain and volume, so suffice to say the Grand Pacifics are optimized for players who prefer a pure-acoustic approach and do not want an onboard pickup system (and the slight weight increase that accompanies it), or plan on using aftermarket electronics or a mic. Every time I've seen Andy Powers demonstrate a Grand Pacific, it was sans amplification (although sometimes a mic was used), and that says something about the importance he's placed on making these guitars excel as acoustic instruments.

Choosing one over the other isn't easy. The 517's mahogany construction gives it abundant midrange complexity and warmth, while the rosewood 717 sounds brighter and has a little more low-end extension. Both sound excellent for fingerstyle playing, and it's really a matter of taste as to which would better suit a bluegrass lead picker. One common characteristic is how both guitars are voiced so that notes tend to blend together to create a rich composite sound. It's core to what Powers was seeking from these guitars, and he points to how a chord played on a Grand Pacific sounds more like an organ, whereas the same chord played on, say, a Taylor 814 sounds more like a piano. It's an accurate assessment of how these new guitars depart from the "Taylor sound," and it's something you can only fully appreciate by getting one in your hands and hearing how it responds.

Bottom line, the Builder's Edition Grand Pacific guitars bring a cool new flavor to the Taylor line and will certainly establish themselves as every bit the studio and stage workhorses that so many players have depended on from Taylor flat-tops. Kudos to Andy Powers for creating an entirely modern guitar that in many ways is the one he has always dreamed of. **A**

