







## FIRST PLAY



**SE T50E**  
£749

**WHAT IS IT?** A wide-shouldered all-rounder to delight pickers and strummers alike



**SE A60E**  
£879

**WHAT IS IT?** A fingerstylist's dream cloaked in a beautiful alternative to Brazilian rosewood

# Electro Magnetic

Shipped with fingerboards full of trademark bird inlays, two newbies transcend the anonymity of the electro-acoustic flock with sharp features and some very exotic tonewood

**Words** Ed Mitchell **Photography** Neil Godwin

**W**hen was the last time you went shopping for a new acoustic guitar? What was once a pleasant afternoon spent strumming down your local guitar emporium now feels more like some epic quest worthy of a Sir Walter Scott novel. You're literally spoiled for choice these days. You can't see the sustainable tonewood for the reclaimed mammoth bone and responsibly sourced abalone...

The fact is, stamping any kind of brand identity into a new acoustic guitar isn't easy. Most of the gear out there conforms to tried-and-trusted body formats, not least the iconic 'dreadnought'. If you haven't

1. While it shares the solid Sitka spruce top of its stablemate, the T50E comes spec'd with figured maple back and sides. You also get a mahogany neck, ebony fingerboard and bridge. Eye candy comes courtesy of the abalone soundhole rosette and body purfling

2. Both models feature a beautifully sweeping headstock shape with chrome tuners



sussed it out already, that's where the new PRS SE T50E and SE A60E models have a distinct advantage over the legions of doppelgängers. They are, well, distinctive. By incorporating some well-kenned eye-candy from its electric solidbody stuff, it's immediately obvious that these are PRS guitars. The sweeping headstock shape is Exhibit A. The beautifully installed 'bird' fingerboard inlays are the smoking gun.

Both these new Chinese-made models are members of PRS's affordable SE sub-brand. The Vintage Sunburst T50E features the PRS Tonare Grand body style; the Natural finish A60E is built around the company's pretty Angelus Cutaway profile.

Beyond the headstock shape and brand name, these guitars have a lot more in common. Shared features include solid Sitka spruce tops, three-piece 643mm (25.3-inch) scale mahogany necks, 300mm (11.8-inch) radius ebony fingerboards with 20 medium-sized frets, plus ebony bridge plates and bone top nuts and saddles. There's also some nice abalone soundhole rosette detailing and shiny chrome tuners on the spec sheets. You get a proper deluxe hard case, too. Dig deeper and you find each of these characters comes brandishing a





Fishman GT-1 preamp and under-saddle pickup. Yes, you're looking at a pair of well-sorted electro-acoustics here.

There are differences to ponder, too. While the T50E comes spec'd with figured maple back and sides, the A60E finds its solid Sitka-spruce top partnered with sheets of finest ziricote. Obviously, at this price we're talking laminates, not solid wood. But, er, stop the bus for a second. Ziricote? Now, we don't imagine for a second that you'll care that this timber's scientific name is *Cordia Dodecandra*. You might even shrug when confronted with the fact this stuff is grown in Mexico and South America. What should grab your attention is what this wood looks and sounds like. Ziricote is a denser and more highly figured alternative to the CITES-protected Brazilian rosewood.

### Feel & Sounds

Both the T50E and A60E play host to PRS's much-loved and fingered Wide Fat neck profile. At just under 43mm at the nut, this shape isn't actually all that wide and it's not quite as chubby as the name suggests, either. Judging by the satisfying amount of beef slapped into our palm we'll chalk this shape

There's a warmth that doubles up when you switch from a pick to the fleshy tips of your fingers

up to a full C. A low action and sensibly spec'd 0.012 to 0.053 gauge strings help achieve a maximum score for the playability in both SEs.

Being newborns, these guitars will take a bit of encouragement before they reach tonal adolescence. That said, the use of X/Classical hybrid top bracing hasn't half given them a great start in life. This setup offers the string tension resisting strength of traditional X-bracing, the format you'd find on, say, a dreadnought, with the flexibility of a classical guitar top. The more that top vibrates, the greater the tonal sweetness and output.

It only bloody works. There's a huge bottom-end twang in the T50E's delivery. It's that 'piano-like' thing that acoustic junkies are always going on about. The top-end is bright of course, yet there's an

3. The beauty is more than skin deep here. PRS has spec'd a hybrid X/Classical bracing on the underside of these solid Sitka spruce tops. This arrangement offers the perfect balance of strength and flexibility to boost volume and tonal output

4. Both feature ebony bridge plates, as well as bone top nuts and saddles

5. PRS has picked the tried-and-trusted Fishman GT-1 preamp for the A60E and T50E. Working in cahoots with an under-saddle piezo, the GT-1's volume and tone controls can be found lurking just inside each guitar's soundhole

6. The cutaway-bodied A60E teams its solid Sitka spruce top with some highly figured ziricote back and sides. The timber feast doesn't end there thanks to the curly maple body binding, a mahogany neck and the ebony fingerboard and bridge



underlying warmth that doubles up when you switch from a pick to the fleshy tips of your fingers.

The A60E doesn't quite have the same bottom-end depth of its SE sibling, but you can't help feeling it's in the post. While the T50E comes across as the all-rounder, the A60E reveals itself as the fingerstylist's apprentice. Arpeggiated chords roll out sweetly and we love the consistency of output during jazzy breaks. Each note pings off the fretboard like a hyperactive flea. It's exactly what we expected. The rosewood-like vibe of the ziricote is warm and rounded; the figured maple gives the other guitar its clearly defined zing.

Plugging in evens the playing field a bit. The Fishman GT-1 preamp lurks inside a guitar's soundhole – poke around with a finger and you'll encounter its volume and tone controls. As you would expect, the Fishman system cuts the old mustard. There's a lot of tonal variety here and while you miss the 3D dynamics of a mic and pickup combo, you get pretty damn close to each SE's acoustic voice when you plug in.





7

## Verdict

The obvious target of the PRS marketing for the T50E and A60E is the existing SE punter. You've gotta love that you can get the same neck profile on your solidbody and electro-acoustic guitars. That goes for lovers of US-made PRS gear, too. Both these new models offer a high-enough spec and build quality to make them attractive to you well-heeled customers.

The big success story here concerns that X/Classical hybrid top bracing. It can take a solid-spruce top some months of player-induced vibration to reveal its full vocal range. But here, by allowing its tops to vibrate as freely as possible, PRS has released some of that long-awaited maturity ahead of schedule. We still reckon these guys have got some growing up to do, but they sound tonally precocious straight from the factory.

It's tough to grumble about these things. Both guitars play and sound as good as you could ever expect for less than a grand. Way better, in fact. They look the absolute business as well, especially the A50E's breathtaking ziricote bits. If you're about to embark on a quest to find a sorted electro-acoustic, the epic new SE models are a great place to start. Indeed, they could save you a lot of time. **G**

7. The new models feature the PRS Wide Fat neck profile. In practice, this doesn't feel as wide as the name suggests, but there is a satisfying amount of palm-filling meat on offer here



## PRS SE T50E

**PRICE:** £749 (inc case)  
**ORIGIN:** China  
**TYPE:** Tonare Grand electro-acoustic  
**TOP:** Solid Sitka spruce with X/Classical bracing and abalone purfling  
**BACK/SIDES:** Figured maple (laminate)  
**MAX RIM DEPTH:** 110mm  
**MAX BODY WIDTH:** 394mm  
**NECK:** Mahogany  
**SCALE LENGTH:** 643mm (25.3")  
**TUNERS:** Chrome PRS-Designed  
**NUT/WIDTH:** Bone/43mm  
**FINGERBOARD:** Ebony with bird inlays, 300mm (11.8") radius  
**FRETS:** 20, medium  
**BRIDGE/SPACING:** Ebony with bone saddle/56mm  
**WEIGHT (kg/lb):** 2.2/4.9  
**PICKUP/PREAMP:** Fishman GT-1 with under-saddle pickup  
**RANGE OPTIONS:** All electro-acoustic: TXE20ENA Natural (£549); TE40ENA Natural and TE40ETS Tobacco Sunburst (£649); TE55EBG Natural top and Black Gold Burst back & sides and TE55EBH Abaco Green (£829); and TE60ENA Natural (£879)  
**LEFT-HANDERS:** No  
**FINISH:** Vintage Sunburst (as reviewed), Natural (top) with Black Gold Burst (back & sides)

PRS Europe  
 01223 874301  
[www.prsguitars.com](http://www.prsguitars.com)



9/10

**PROS** We're sold on the great playability and pleasing good looks, but it's the tone that really knocks us bandy; this guitar feels alive in our hands

**CONS** Like a vegan barbecue... there's not a sausage



## PRS SE A60E

**PRICE:** £879 (inc case)  
**ORIGIN:** China  
**TYPE:** Angelus Cutaway electro-acoustic  
**TOP:** Solid Sitka spruce with X/Classical bracing and abalone purfling  
**BACK/SIDES:** Ziricote (laminate) with curly maple binding  
**MAX RIM DEPTH:** 110mm  
**MAX BODY WIDTH:** 394mm  
**NECK:** Mahogany  
**SCALE LENGTH:** 643mm (25.3")  
**TUNERS:** Chrome PRS-Designed  
**NUT/WIDTH:** Bone/43mm  
**FINGERBOARD:** Ebony with abalone bird inlays and curly maple binding, 300mm (11.8") radius  
**FRETS:** 20, medium  
**BRIDGE/SPACING:** Ebony with bone saddle/56mm  
**WEIGHT (kg/lb):** 2.2/4.9  
**PICKUP/PREAMP:** Fishman GT-1 with under-saddle pickup  
**RANGE OPTIONS:** All electro-acoustic: AE20ENA Natural (£599); AE40ENA and AE40ETS Tobacco Sunburst (£689); AE50EVS Vintage Sunburst and AE50EBG Natural top with Black Gold Burst back & sides (£799); AE55EBG Natural top with Black Gold Burst back & sides and AE55EBH Abaco Green (£829)  
**LEFT-HANDERS:** No  
**FINISH:** Natural (as reviewed)



9/10

**PROS** Playability, tone, build quality, pickup performance – this thing just keeps on ticking boxes; then there's all that sweet ziricote

**CONS** Again, it's tough to be mean when you're presented with a package that's put together so well