



Ovation 2005 Collectors' Edition & Adamas Limited Edition 12-Fret Slot-Head £1,699 & £2,149

The rivals

2005 COLLECTORS' Takamine TAN46C

£1,109

Taylor 414ce £1,799

Yamaha LJX26C £2,049

Takamine's cutaway Sitka spruce/rosewood NEX electro has laminate sides, solid mahogany neck, rosewood fingerboard without inlays, rosewood bridge, tort scratchplate, gold tuners and Cool Tube preamp. Taylor's Sitka spruce/ovangkol GA electro has a solid mahogany neck, black/white rosette, tortoise scratchplate, pearl dot fingerboard inlays, satin finish back/sides and Expression System. Yamaha's cutaway medium-jumbo electro has rosewood back/sides, five-ply mahogany/padauk neck, pearl diamond fingerboard inlays, black/white rosette and top purfling, maple binding, tortoise scratchplate, open-g geared gold-plate Gotoh tuners and a Baggs/Yamaha dual system

Riding Bowl-back: Ovation's Collectors' Edition returns, boasting full LX spec and a newly shaped bowl, while Adamas brings a thunderous 12-fretter to its 30th birthday party by Matthew Wig

With decreasing annual production numbers over the last decade or so, Ovation fans and collectors might have been a little concerned, especially when the ever-faithful Collectors' Edition took a rest in 2004 (the first gap since the Collectors' Series launch, back in Ovation's 1982 heyday). Last year, however, the successful launch of the LX Series models (see *Guitarist* 250), with their impressive bundle of upgraded features has proved a considerable boost for this company. As demand has snowballed over the last year, several other LX-upgraded models have been added to Ovation's line, so it's only fitting that this year's Collectors' Edition should carry the full compliment of LX features. In addition to this, the 2005 Collectors' also boasts the new 'Deep Contour' bowl, which we'll explain later.

Pioneering a super-thin carbon fibre laminate top, and replacing the single central soundhole with multiple soundholes on the upper bout, which in turn facilitated a new kind of lighter fan bracing, the Adamas took the radical Ovation concept to the next level. We now find Ovation's offshoot brand marking its 30th anniversary, and to celebrate, the company is releasing four commemorative limited editions (100 pieces per model). While three are accurate reproductions of classic

Adamas models from the mid-1970s and early 1980s (see Ovation's website for more), the U681T 12-fret slot-head electro is a specially concocted new-retro concept, encompassing aspects of both old and new Adamas I and II models, as well as taking inspiration from other Ovation designs.

2005 Collectors' Edition

Inside, this guitar is generally shipshape, with the traditional-looking LX-pattern soundboard X-bracing, and tall, deeply scalloped square-sided struts. It has a classic creamy blonde Engelmann spruce top, and it's even-toned, tight-grained and pleasantly feathery. Its rosette echoes Collings with its crosscut grained ivoroid bands, separated from the flawless abalone centre by thin black seams. Both this and the black/white perimeter purfling are fittingly clean-cut. Body binding is also grained ivoroid.

The 'Deep Contour' concept takes the deepest Ovation bowl, which delivers the fullest acoustic tone but tends to slip around in use, and effectively flattens out a large central area of the back, while simultaneously bulging it out around the edges. The end result is a slightly boxier shape. Made from the new Lyrachord GS, it's lighter and stronger too.

Another LX feature is Ovation's Advanced Neck System (see *Guitarist*

OVATION 2005	TEST RESULTS
Build quality	★★★★★
Playability	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★
<p>■ WE LIKED Consistent action and intonation at all neck positions; nifty preamp</p> <p>■ WE DISLIKED Slightly squidgy bottom end; a few minor imperfections</p>	

250 or Ovation's website), where the bowl, top and neck are more integrated via a complex bolted mortise and tenon joint. Combined with the rigid lengthways laminate neck – which itself has additional carbon fibre strips embedded in its lower (body end) half, on either side of the dual-acting truss rod – this system aims to deliver precise neck alignment, improved fingerboard evenness and long-term stability and adjustability.

The fingerboard and its frets are cleanly, if not exactly flawlessly, presented. Its minimal 12th fret motif, which represents the curved contour outline on the back of the bowl, is neat, but it's visibly bordered by black filler. Fractionally narrow for this neck width, the nut is otherwise squarely seated. These generic tuners feel solid and smooth-g geared. Plain and tidy, the silken finish ebony bridge is a standard, pinless slotted design.

Surprisingly, we spotted a few minor, lobbly imperfections in the top's clear



You can literally play anywhere on the Adamas with equally good results, and it's so responsive that you get plenty of output without having to really dig in

gloss coat, but it's otherwise a notably thin, very even application.

Ovation's Original Patented Pickup (formerly entitled High Output) is cloned from the 1970s unit; the OP-Pro preamp. This, however, is the latest of the contemporary modular units. Designed in collaboration with long-time endorsers Al Di Meola and Melissa Etheridge, the OP-Pro's layout is clear and its features are essential yet minimal. Using the tuner without

plugging in is a real bonus, while the additional XLR output ensures ideal inter-connection, and phantom powering options.

The classic Ovation feel comes via a slim, soft V-profile neck that tapers from 22mm (1st fret) to just above 25mm (10th fret) in depth, a fairly arched fingerboard and cosy string spacing that favours tight chords and lead runs. Cosmetic shortcomings aside, the fingerboard and frets are

smooth enough to the touch, and a gloss neck is always nice.

With the LX neck system, we yet again note the fingerboard's textbook length-long uniformity, alignment and relief curvature, and this review model's consistent and easy action shows this off perfectly. Intonation is spot-on at the 12th, and with the small heel and spacious, deep cutaway, there's extensive access to these harmonious upper frets.

OVATION 2005 COLLECTORS' EDITION (2005-ES)

PRICE: £1,699 (inc. deluxe moulded hard-shell case)

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Cutaway 'Deep Contour' bowl body electro-acoustic

TOP: Solid Engelmann spruce

BACK/SIDES: Black lyrachord GS

MAX BOWL DEPTH: 146mm

MAX BODY WIDTH: 403mm

NECK: Five-piece mahogany/maple laminate

SCALE LENGTH: 640mm

TUNERS: Individual die-cast gold Ovation

NUT/WIDTH: Tusq/43mm

FINGERBOARD: Ebony, ivoroid-bound, with 12th fret abalone 'Contour Curve' inlay, 254mm (10-inch) radius

FRETS: 20, medium-wide

BRIDGE/SPACING: Ebony/56mm

ELECTRICS: Ovation Patented Pickup into OP-Pro preamp, featuring gain, three-band EQ, 'Shape' pre-EQ circuit, onboard chromatic tuner with instant calibration facility, low battery/phantom power LED, 6.35mm jack and balanced XLR outputs, quick release preamp housing for easy battery access. Power – one 9V battery or phantom power via XLR

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 2.4/5.3

RANGE OPTIONS: Standard Balladeer LX 1771LX (£1,149) with A-grade Sitka spruce top, cutaway mid-depth regular bowl body, rosewood fingerboard/bridge, pearloid dot/diamond fingerboard inlays, sparse 'silver oakleaf on black' inlaid rosette, no XLR out, chrome tuners and black/natural/cherry-cherryburst finishes. Legend LX 1777LX (£1,449) with AA-grade Sitka spruce top, cutaway mid-depth regular bowl body, pearloid dot/diamond fingerboard inlays, bold 'silver oakleaf on black' inlaid rosette and natural/transparent burgundy finishes

LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISHES: Natural gloss top and neck (as reviewed)

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PHOTOGRAPHY: KATHARINE LANE SIMS

ADAMAS LIMITED EDITION 12-FRET SLOT-HEAD (U681T-5)
PRICE: £2,149 (inc. deluxe moulded hard-shell case)

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Non-cutaway deep bowl body electro-acoustic with 12-fret neck and slotted headstock

TOP: Original Adamas Fibronic carbon-fibre soundboard – three-ply carbon-fibre laminate with birch core

BACK/SIDES: Black lyrachord

MAX BOWL DEPTH: 146mm

MAX BODY WIDTH: 402mm

NECK: Five-piece mahogany/maple/ebony laminate

SCALE LENGTH: 640mm

TUNERS: Individual die-cast gold side-mount Schallers w/ ebony buttons

NUT/WIDTH: Tusq/44.5mm

FINGERBOARD: Ebony, black-bound, with Adamas I-style m-o-P inlay, 254mm (10-inch) radius

FRETS: 20, medium-wide

BRIDGE/SPACING: Ebony/56mm

ELECTRICS: Original Patented pickup into OP-Pro preamp, featuring gain, three-band EQ, Shape pre-EQ circuit, onboard chromatic tuner with instant calibration facility and LED display window, low battery / phantom power LED, 6.35mm jack and balanced XLR outputs, quick release preamp housing for easy battery access. Power – one 9V battery or phantom power via XLR

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 2.5/5.5

OPTIONS: None

LEFT-HANDERS: No

FINISHES: Black graphite top (matt finish) w/gold speckles, natural matt-satin neck and black satin headstock face (as reviewed)

www.adamasguitars.com

→ The new Deep Contour bowl really does sit more snugly against the body, losing that typical 'rolling away' feeling. One gripe, however, is that the top's binding edge is left too sharp-cornered and it really digs into a bare arm.

SOUNDS: While the soft, boingy bass lends a slightly rubbery sound to the bottom E, the treble response counters this with its spicy, biting edge that helps re-focus each pluck. Top string high notes sound both thick and snappy and the mid-range is generally even and well controlled, with both the deeper bowl and the LX bracing helping to enrich these registers. It sounds

less scooped than we've come to expect, and within the broad mid-frequency range, you really hear the quirky growl of the Lyrachord bowl. Even with its new contouring, this bowl pumps plenty of noise out, tending to push it straight out front rather than up to the player. Sustain is slightly moderated by this review model's very low action.

The soft bass sounds particularly thud-like and there's a lack of warmth to qualify it as real fingerstyle beauty. Attack this guitar with a plectrum, though, and it responds with a snappy, almost elastically dynamic quality that's great fun to work with, from a robust strum to a lightning lead run.

Matched with the OP-Pro preamp, you won't hear the OPP sounding

better. It's easy to forget just how thick the flat-EQ sound is, responding very well to a bit of mid scoop, while leaving the treble still with plenty of body and sweetness. A significant degree of the acoustic flavour is retained too. The Shape switch offers the signature Ovation electro tone, for those who partake, but outboard EQ'ing will extract a more natural and refreshingly non-buzzy sound.

Adamas 12-Fret Slot-Head

This is essentially the Adamas version of Ovation's old-style Folklore model, but with a slightly slimmer neck.

The textured Fibronic top is old-

school Adamas, but otherwise it's styled and spec'd more like the plainer, modern SMT/CVT models.

Within this guitar's standard issue deep bowl is some tidy, if a little glue-splodged,

joinery. The light, vertical fan bracing, which is known as Quintad, is a vital factor in the Adamas soundboard's enhanced vibrational response.

The laminate top has two 0.13mm (0.005-inch) carbon fibre outer layers and a 0.89mm (0.035-inch) birch or poplar veneer sandwiched between. The carbon fibres run lengthways, while the wood veneer grain is offset at 60 degrees to yield a very thin, rigid membrane that offers improved dynamic response compared to thicker, more heavily braced spruce tops. Outside, its matt black finish is

lightly speckled with gold, which does look a bit like you've been decorating too near to it. Of all the Adamas soundhole designs, the five-piece epaulet is the simplest option, using maple, walnut, teak and padauk. Love it or loathe it, this helps to strengthen the portholes. As usual, the white outer binding is left very sharp-cornered, and looks a bit cheap.

Joined via the standard double-bolt method, the laminate neck features the central ebony stratum, the ebony fingerboard and black headstock face of contemporary Adamas models.

Cleaner, and with less filler round the inlays, this model's fingerboard is tidier than that of its Ovation cousin.

While the slotted headstock may increase the string break angle over the nut, its slimline design forces the middle two strings to rest on the central section, which isn't ideal for tuning stability. Understandably, these side-mount tuners are a bit stiffer than the other guitar's set. All other details match the Collectors' model though.

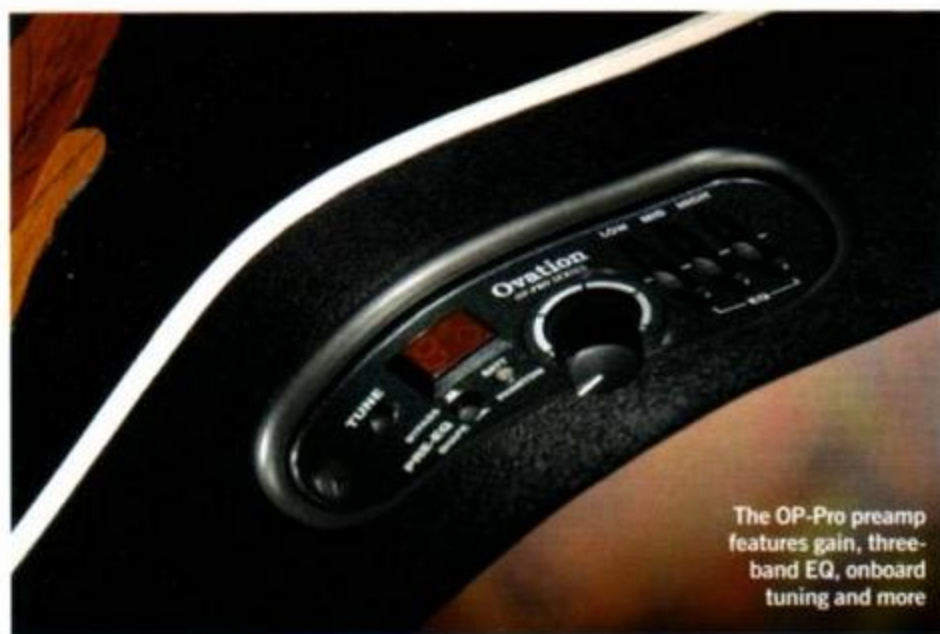
To play, this similarly profiled neck is wider but not deeper than the other model's, so it's a bit roomier for your fingertips, without feeling any more cumbersome. It all feels very slick, too, in that dry satin kind of way.

Not that it really matters on a 12-fretter, especially considering this model's slightly higher action, but you can spot some typical 'rolling off' of the fingerboard beyond the body joint if you're looking down from the nut. It's a common issue that the previous LX model's neck is designed to eradicate.

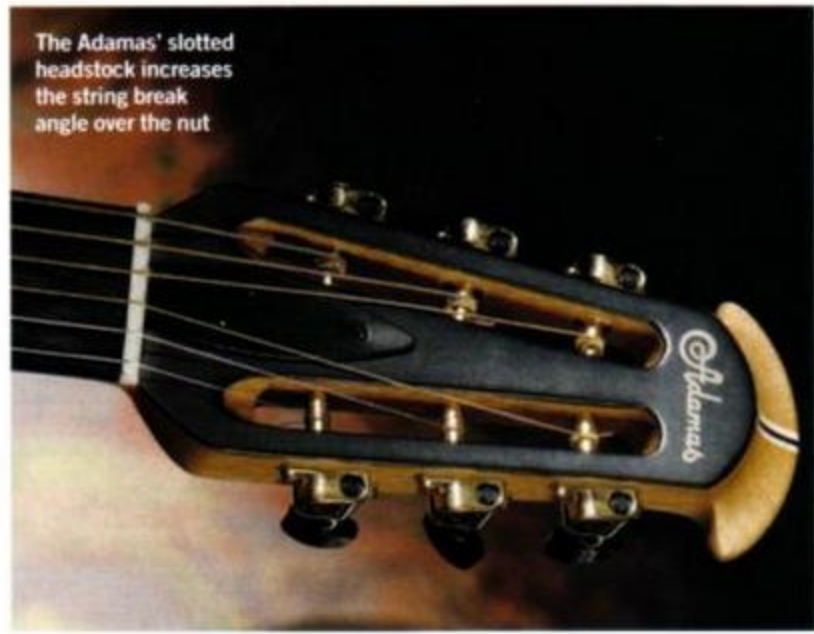
Ovation has chosen the logical way to breathe life into its brand; that is, by serving up a whole host of fresh ideas

The creamy spruce top gives the Ovation 2005 a classic look





The OP-Pro preamp features gain, three-band EQ, onboard tuning and more



The Adamas' slotted headstock increases the string break angle over the nut

Equally spot-on 12th fret intonation, however, may still tempt some to stretch into that region.

Typically, this standard deep bowl tends to move around when you're stood up playing, clearly proving what a welcome tweak the Deep Contour bowl is. Again, the sharp-cornered body binding is uncomfortable.

SOUNDS: With the 12-fret neck's ideal bridge placement and all of the Adamas' other intrinsic tweaks, there's a considerable boost in volume and general beefing up of the whole sound compared to the Collectors' model.

There's incredible bass resonance from the 12-fret, particularly around the bottom E and F, where it's almost overwhelming. The mid-range is also a potent driving force, but remains even-contoured and clear voiced. At the top end, there's a hard, spicy edge. While this provides the piercing attack for every note you pluck, top-string high notes also exhibit thick, sweet-sounding undertones that add sustain and musical energy as far up as you can play. You can literally play anywhere on this instrument with equally good

ADAMAS LTD EDITION	TEST RESULTS
Build quality	★★★★★
Playability	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★

■ **WE LIKED** Very responsive; energetic acoustic tone; good plugged-in performance

■ **WE DISLIKED** Big boomy bass can sometimes be a bit dominating

results, and it's so responsive that you get plenty of output without having to really dig in. Play harder and the exceptional dynamics track every calorie of your input energy.

To a wood guitar purist, this tone will smack of too much physics and not enough loving lutherie, and while it's true that you always get a sense of the bowl's internal reverberation, it does its job very efficiently. It makes for a very broad-toned, sensitive and crisply articulate, if slightly hard-sounding, fingerpicker, as well as a monstrously roaring strum machine. However, it's playing plectrum-picked arpeggios and lead that will bring a smile to your face.

Via the pickup's more generic sound, you do hear the extra bass, but the significant differences between this

and the other model's acoustic tone don't come across so clearly.

Verdict

Ovation has chosen the logical way to breathe life into its brand; that is, by serving up a whole host of fresh ideas and, more importantly, better guitars. With its new bowl and LX upgrades, the 2005 Collectors' Edition's smart yet relatively plain appearance belies its significance as the shape of things to come. The Ovation tone and style will still divide modern opinion, but it's one of the most impressive guitars we've played in years. For the price, it's not the most flawlessly executed display of lutherie, but its performance is superb.

The Adamas, on the other hand, isn't breaking new ground, but it delivers an interesting and thoroughly enjoyable fusion of concepts. It's expensive, but then it's a unique, strictly limited commemorative edition. **G**

Ovation 2005 Collectors' Edition

Guitarist RATING ★★★★★

Adamas Limited Edition 12-Fret

Guitarist RATING ★★★★★

The rivals

ADAMAS 12-FRET RainSong DR1000	£1,595
Martin D-18VS	£2,199

Direct comparisons are non-existent, but there is RainSong's all-graphite (carbon fibre) standard dreadnought, which has no internal bracing or neck truss-rod, epoxy fingerboard, abalone rosette, m-o-p Sharks fingerboard inlays, UV protective clear urethane gloss finish, chrome Gotoh tuners and Baggs Element system. For a traditional all-wood 12-fretter, there's Martin's vintage-spec spruce/mahogany D-18VS dreadnought (not priced for optional pickup system)