



The latest contender in the one-guitar-to-do-it-all stakes comes from electro-acoustic specialists Ovation. Review by Martyn Casserly

# Ovation

## VXT Hybrid Electric

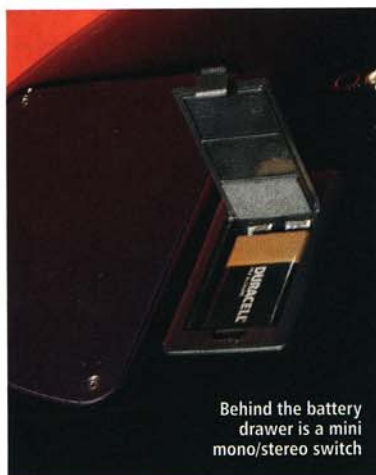
**T**here's been a quiet revolution going on in the electric guitar world for a while now.

Traditionally, working musicians would be forced to take several guitars to gigs if they wanted different textures or acoustic sounds, and they'd have to worry about keeping them all in tune and performing miracle quick-swap manoeuvres. Now various makers are doing their best to provide a one-guitar solution to this age-old problem. Line 6 has the Variax, of course, with its various electric, acoustic and unusual options (sitar or banjo, anyone?); Fender has recently revealed the VG Strat which comes loaded with a range of pickup emulations, acoustic models and altered tunings; and Taylor has the very lovely T5 electric/acoustic hybrid.

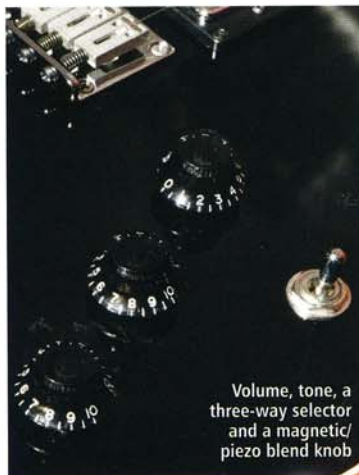
Into this emerging market comes Ovation, a company famed for its innovative bowl-back acoustic design. Their new VXT promises classic electric guitar sounds and playability, with the added bonus of high-quality acoustic tones. It sounds great, but let's investigate further.

### First Impressions

An Ovation head on an electric? We haven't seen the like since the Preacher and Viper of the '70s



Behind the battery drawer is a mini mono/stereo switch



Volume, tone, a three-way selector and a magnetic/piezo blend knob

## The new VXT promises classic electric sounds and playability, with the bonus of quality acoustic tones

At first glance the VXT looks a little, well, plain. The body shape is large, and rather reminds us of an electro-acoustic with its single cutaway and minimalist design. It's not ugly – far from it – but it lacks the curvy charm of a 335 or the purposeful, no-nonsense attitude of a Fender Tele.

Honduras mahogany is the wood of choice for the body, and chambers have been routed out to add natural acoustics and lighten the weight. The top is AAA grade spruce, edgebound in grained ivory. The neck is again mahogany with a 22-fret rosewood fingerboard, dot inlays, binding, and the classic Ovation headstock sporting

three-a-side Schaller-style tuners. The finishing is generally of a very good standard, although close examination reveals an orange stain in the binding by the cutaway, and the nut looks a little scruffy. Neither of these affect the playability, but should be addressed on a guitar in this price bracket.

Electrics are a pair of Seymour Duncan '59 humbuckers and a Fishman Powerbridge with Ovation's own VIP (Virtual Image Processing) acoustic preamp. These are controlled by a three-way switch (for the humbuckers) a master volume, a tone (for the humbuckers again), and a Blend knob. The Blend control is a

### FACTFILE

#### OVATION VXT

**Description:** Semi-hollow electric/acoustic hybrid. Made in the USA

**Price:** £1499 inc. case

**Build:** Honduras mahogany body and set neck. Rosewood fingerboard with 22 frets. AAA grade spruce top with grained ivory binding. Schaller-style tuners

**Electrics:** Two Seymour Duncan '59 humbuckers, Fishman Powerbridge piezo pickup system, three-way switch, master volume, tone, and Blend controls

**Left-handers:** No

**Finish:** Teardrop burst, black

**Scale length:** 641mm/25.25"

**Neck width:**  
Nut 42mm  
12th fret 52mm

**Depth of neck:**  
First fret 20mm  
12th fret 22mm

**String spacing:**  
Nut 35mm  
Bridge 52.5mm

**Action as supplied**  
12th fret treble 3mm  
12th fret bass 3mm

**Weight:** 3.2kg/7lbs

**Contact:**  
John Hornby Skewes  
☎ 01132 865381

**Web:** www.thevxt.com

THE COMPETITION

**FENDER**  
**VG Strat**

A standard USA Fender Strat with a modelling circuit that provides humbuckers, P90s, acoustics and altered tuning. They should sell a fair few  
**RRP** £1549

**TAYLOR**  
**TS Standard**

Revolutionary hybrid from the acoustic giants. Hollow body, spruce or maple top, electric and acoustic pickups mixed with an onboard preamp. Nice  
**RRP** £1799

**PARKER**  
**Nitefly M**

Lightweight, original styling, twin humbuckers and a piezo bridge. All this, and a really classy player too  
**RRP** £1299

simple idea done well. At one extreme you have only the magnetic pickups, then as you turn the knob it dials in more and more of the Fishman until, at the other extreme, that's all you have. This should make using it on stage a doddle. No switches or fiddly knobs that need precise turns – just a standard control that we've all used hundreds of times.

Turning the guitar over we find the six ferrules that house the ball-ends of the strings, plus the control panel housing and a battery compartment that also has a mono/stereo switch which allows you (via a Y cable – not supplied) to output the acoustic and electric sounds to different amps or PA.

**SOUNDS**

Acoustically the VXT is bright, loud and springy – all thanks, most probably, to the acoustic-friendly body chambers. Plugging it into a clean amp reveals a more vintage-style sound. The neck pickup is warm, clear and well-balanced, and would suit jazz or pop players in particular. Both pickups together adds a bit more edge to the sound and the bridge pickup by itself is bright and spiky but lacks a little complexity when compared to the richer neck pickup.

Turning the gain on the amp up to a moderate level we find the neck pickup starts to sound a bit like a 335, with dark, fuzzy tones on double stops and country bends, while digging in with the pick causes proud chimey notes to



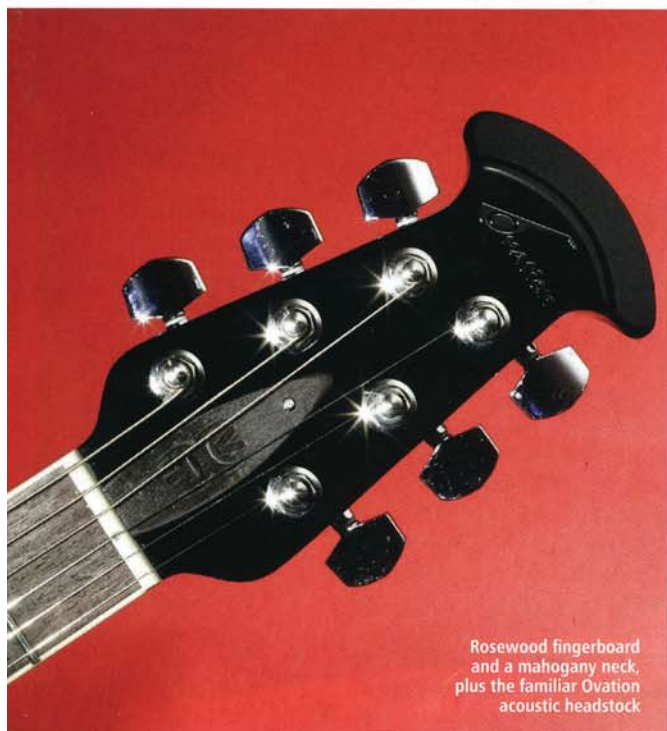
Dialling in the Fishman Powerbridge, the VXT turns into a highly useable and very realistic acoustic guitar

sing out – a blues player's delight. The middle setting lends itself to classic Rolling Stones-type chords and riffs, with a pleasant mix of aggression and depth. Selecting the bridge pickup opens up the sound even further and gives us more articulation and bite, as you would expect. At times the bridge is reminiscent of the tones of REM's Peter Buck with his semi-hollowbody Rickenbackers and Gretsches. Cranking the amp further allows all the pickups to rock out, and here the response is bright, aggressive and definitely in the classic rock camp. Musical feedback can be coaxied out without too much effort, and soloing is a joy.

But of course this is only half the story. Returning to the clean channel and dialling in the Fishman Powerbridge, the VXT turns into a highly usable acoustic-type guitar. The tones are warm and percussive, with excellent dynamic response and high-quality definition. Lobbing the pick and reverting to fingerpicking results in some very realistic sounds, and the more 'electric' nature of the playing feel means you can try things that might be quite difficult on an acoustic if you're not used to playing them. Experimenting with the Blend knob adds some interesting variations; mix this with the ability to separate the signal going to your amps, and the possibilities are intriguing.

**VERDICT**

The Ovation VXT is a very interesting guitar. It's capable of high-quality electric tones; that's tempting enough in itself, but there's also an excellent acoustic element which broadens its appeal. Stylistically it may well divide potential buyers – the body shape is a little indistinct, and it's odd to see the Ovation headstock on an electric – but that would be missing the point, for as a tool for a working musician who needs a range of sounds, both electric and acoustic, it's very good indeed. The controls are simple and won't catch you out on a dark, cramped stage in the middle of a sweaty gig. If you play in a covers or function band, the VXT should be the very next guitar you try out. Can it do everything? No. But it can do most things that your average musician would want, and it does them very well.



Rosewood fingerboard and a mahogany neck, plus the familiar Ovation acoustic headstock

**FINAL SCORE**

<b>Build Quality</b> .....	<b>18/20</b>
<b>Playability</b> .....	<b>17/20</b>
<b>Sound</b> .....	<b>18/20</b>
<b>Value for money</b> .....	<b>16/20</b>
<b>Vibe</b> .....	<b>15/20</b>
<b>TOTAL</b> .....	<b>84%</b>

**Good for...** all-round electric duties with a side-helping of acoustic sounds  
**Look elsewhere...** high-gain rock or metal