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Ovation Elite 1778T-5

Fantastic Black Fiberglas Bowlback

By Douglas Baldwin

Most acoustic guitar manufacturers cautiously introduce one or two innovations per decade. Not Ovation. Since the company's inception in 1966, it's been shocking conservatives and pleasing serious musicians with designs that stretch the limits of what a guitar can be. The Elite 1778T-5 is an example of this bold approach, a Stealth-like black beauty not for the faint of heart.

STRIP SHOW

The Elite 1778T-5 is as remarkable for what's been stripped away from a standard Elite as for its features. The garnish of sound holes on the cutaway bout is gone, as are Ovation's signature leaf-motif epaulets. Also absent are any traces of decorative inlays or binding, which, along with the textured black body finish and matte black headstock face, leaves the Elite 1778T-5 looking like the perfect vehicle for a goth industrialist's "mellow" set. The finish is thinner than the more common urethane finish, allowing the spruce top to vibrate more freely. The only visible sign of traditional wood is in the starkly contrasting blond maple neck, shaved down to appeal to electric players.

Ovation's round-back body design is something you either like or you don't—I find it extremely comfortable. In a similar vein, the Ovation tone can be off-putting to those with a preconception of what a Fiberglas guitar should sound like. In fact, the Elite is constructed with some excellent tonewoods, so don't be fooled by looks. This is a powerful acoustic instrument with the volume and nuance of more traditional guitars costing twice as much. When fingerpicked, the Elite 1778T-5 is surprisingly loud, with remarkable bass response and clear highs. Plectrum picking generates a punchy attack with maximal midrange. It's a sound that seems likely to cut through a full rock rhythm section even before you fire up the OP-30 preamp.

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HOW IT PLAYS

The Elite 1778T-5 electronics emphasize the instrument's punchy attack and add a notable focus to the bass response that gives rhythm figures like the one below authority. Out-of-the-case playability on our review model was very good. The string height was moderately low yet buzz-free along the entire length. The frets were well dressed at the ends, although faint traces of filing along their crowns added some unwanted scrape to bending and vibrato technique. The neck's matte finish was acceptable but had a faintly sticky feel and some very minor blemishes. At the Elite 1778T-5's price point, these are nit-picking details.

Whether you are drawn to the Elite 1778T-5 for its excellent tone, its Darth Vader vibe, its attractive price, or some combination thereof, this guitar will prove a valuable tool for road, stage, or studio work.

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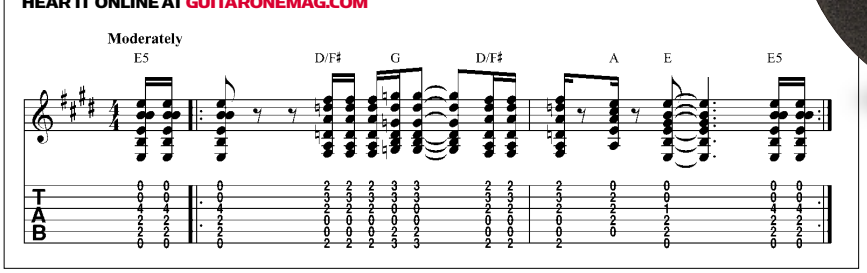

FEATURES Mid-depth bowlback body (super-shallow depth also available); solid sitka spruce top, quintad bracing; bookmatched two-piece maple neck, ebony fretboard, 25¼" scale; 1 1/16" Delrin nut; thinline pickup, ebony bridge; closed black Ovation-branded tuners; OP-30 preamp with push-push switches for EQ in/out, "pre shape" and midrange frequency shift, and onboard chromatic tuner. Available finishes: Textured Black and Textured Pewter; $999 (case extra)