

# PJB BriefCase portable bass combo £450

Breaking the laws of physics with the Phil Jones Bass combo by Roger Newell

## PJB BRIEFCASE BASS COMBO

PRICE: £450

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Ultra-portable

bass practice combo

OUTPUT: 100 watts RMS

SPEAKERS: Two five-

inch high-power, full-

range dedicated

bass speakers

DIMENSIONS: 165 (w)

x 400 (d) x 368mm (h)

WEIGHT (kg/lb):

12.7/28.0

CHANNELS: Single with

active/passive input

switching

CONTROLS: Volume,

five-band EQ,

compression

ADDITIONAL

FEATURES:

Compressor/limiter,

headphone out,

balanced-line out, pre-

amp out, speaker out

EXTRAS: 12-volt DC

option, 110/220-volt AC

or internal rechargeable

battery

RANGE OPTIONS: Six-

pack 700W combo costs

£1,299; various heads

from £199, various

speaker cabinets from

£459

Synergy Distribution

01827 313134

[www.synergysdistribution.co.uk](http://www.synergysdistribution.co.uk)

## The rivals

Mesa Boogie Walkabout

Scout from £1,295

Euphonics Audio iAmp

350 Combo £1,295

Ampeg Portabass

PBC2212 Combo £1,359

Quality portable bass

amps seems to be

something of an

American phenomenon,

but each of these units

is readily available in

the UK. All aim to pack

a lot of power into a

small enclosure for use

at gigs so each has a

significantly higher

output quota than the

PJB and that's reflected

in the price. The

Euphonics Audio iAmp

Combo features the

smallest speaker with a

10-inch driver, the

Ampeg opts for a 12-

inch, while Boogie's

Scout cab utilises a

unique down-firing

Passive Radiator.



PJB BRIEFCASE COMBO	TEST RESULTS
Build quality	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★

- **WE LIKED** Punchy sound; tonal range; ultimate portability
- **WE DISLIKED** The single speaker connection socket

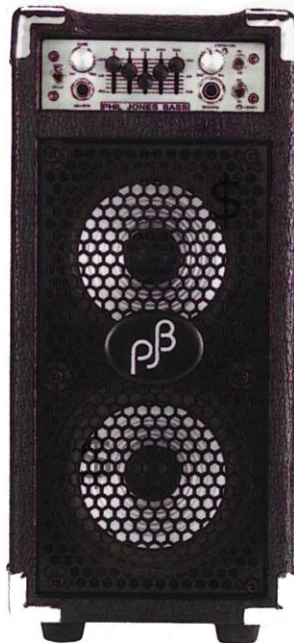
Phil Jones Bass will probably be a new name to you but it's one that you're going to hear a lot more of – and with good reason. The company's design approach to all things bass is unique and somehow seems to challenge the laws of physics. Perhaps the most startling design element is the extensive use of small diameter speakers, and we look forward to investigating some of the rest of the range at a later date, but this highly portable practice piece seems the most logical place to start.

The aptly named BriefCase combo is a refreshing new concept in bass amp portability and can even run on batteries (not included). Small in stature, with a tough exterior that features a metal front grille and chromed corner protectors, this amp has been built to be manhandled. Beneath that robust casing lies an even tougher heart and, in spite of its compact size, this has a powerful 100W output potential. The control panel may seem minimalist but there's plenty here to unleash the amp's qualities. The five EQ sliders neatly divide the tonal range and feature cone-shaped rubber knobs, while the two rotary controls handle volume and compression and, essentially, that's it. There are sockets provided to accommodate DI, preamp out and headphones, but as the speaker enclosure is effectively a separate unit, it plugs into the only speaker socket provided. So if you wish to use a different cabinet, it will replace the existing one rather than enhance it.

**IN USE:** The function of the BriefCase may be focused on practice but its performance is startling. This is no mere bedroom amp – in spite of the diminutive size – this is new bass

technology aimed at breaking the size-to-sound ratio once and for all. Smaller speakers usually mean a punchier delivery and these specifically designed five-inch diameter units certainly pack more punch than most. Apparently they are computer-optimised and housed in a vented enclosure, but whatever the technology involved, the performance here is nothing short of superb. Selecting the correct input mode for your bass is critical if you want the best distortion free results, and whether active or passive, the BriefCase produces some seriously great sounds. The five-band EQ offers ample tone manipulation and seems to accentuate the funky nature of this combo, yet it can also provide a beefy bottom end that is more readily associated with a 15-inch driver. How do they do that?

The amount of delivery and full depth of tone available is hard to comprehend from something this tiny, but the quality of the sound is undeniable. And although 100 watts does not provide a lot of headroom for bass, the distortion-free zone sounds louder than most. Using compression can also help to increase the effective volume by avoiding the extremes produced by a bass guitar. When activated, a blue LED lights up to show that compression is taking place and, it being fully adjustable, you can alter this as you wish. What's more, this has got to be one of the least noisy bass amps around. Even at maximum volume with high boosted EQ, the background noise is virtually non-existent, so this could also be a very



useful recording amp too. It really allows the natural sound of your bass to shine through and it's also an ideal match for upright basses. So whatever your bass leanings; this will comfortably fit the bill.

## Verdict

High quality performance plus compact size usually equals a high price tag – not here. This is very reasonably priced considering the quality involved and the option to use an alternative cabinet to expand its applications. As a dedicated practice amp, the BriefCase is pretty much in a class of its own, and it would be hard to find anything easier to carry around. Not so long ago a quality sounding bass combo of this size was pure fantasy, so it's still hard to believe just how good this is. Trying one for yourself is highly recommended so you can experience it for real. Now there's a UK distributor, it's never been easier to experience all the models in this impressive range. This is one BriefCase that can guarantee it will never be just another day at the office! ■

## PJB BriefCase bass combo

Guitarist RATING

★★★★★